

Vol LXXI.

No. 282

# BELGRAVIA

A  
LONDON MAGAZINE

APRIL

1890

**F. V. WHITE & CO.,**

31, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND, LONDON, W.C.

## **Stories from Belgravia, Part 5 (1889-1893)**

A Stolen Identity by Henry North - July 1889

The Paraschites by Mallard Herbertson - July 1889

A Mysterious House by Algernon Blackwood - July 1889

My Dead Wife by Annie G. Hopkins - September 1889

Professor Brankel's Secret by Fergus Hume - November to  
December 1889

A Ghostly Adventure on Exmoor by Anonymous - July 1891

The Death Dance by Josephine Errol - September 1891

The White Star-Flower. A Legend of Life by Clare Vyvian -  
November 1891

The Prior's Cell by Darley Dale - March 1892

The Noël-Bird. A Legend of Life by Clare Vyvian - May 1892

A Western Mystery by M. B. C. - June 1892

A New Galatea by Lucie H. Armstrong - August 1892

The Crimson Poppies. A Legend of Life by Clare Vyvian -  
September 1892

Haunted by E W. - January 1893

A Dream of a Wild White Doe by Coralie Glyn - February 1893

## A Stolen Identity.

### I.

ARLON STASSART was seated at his breakfast-table, absorbed in meditation. The coffee steamed unheeded in his cup, and the toast stood neglected in the rack, but he paid little attention to either. The room was silent, save for the low murmur of the Thames, as it flowed lazily along in the sunshine of a summer's morning, at the foot of the pleasant little garden that sloped almost imperceptibly down towards its bank. It was a comfortable room, with easy, low-built lounges, one or two well-arranged bookcases, and a few etchings of great value, framed simply in oak, and disclosing vistas of the type of landscape so often found in Norfolk and the Lincolnshire fens—long reaches of still water, with beds of silent rushes standing solemnly in their lonely watch, while here and there a waterfowl sails slowly across a cloudy sky. There were two photographs of rare excellence, representing faces of a dreamy Oriental type of feminine beauty, while the rest of the room was filled artistically with fans, plates, and embroidered hangings, that had evidently been the choice of a connoisseur.

But somehow the room, even on this bright summer morning, gave a somewhat sombre impression. There was but little colour in it, and that little was of a subdued and neutral tint. There seemed to be an indefinable feeling of underlying sadness displayed in the choice of the decorations, harmonising in a subtle way with the expression upon the face of its occupant. Yet nothing in particular could be pointed to as the cause of this generally sombre effect. Only all the ornaments seemed to have been chosen by one who unconsciously was possessed of a quiet melancholy that affected, unnoticed, all his surroundings. Arlon Stassart sighed almost imperceptibly, and glanced through the window at the shimmer of the river that sparkled silently before him. Then he looked again at an open letter that lay beside his plate, and read for the hundredth time the casual remark of the friend who had written to him: 'By the way, do you remember the girl that came up to Oxford last summer term with the Kingsfords? She is going to be married to our friend Kingsford next month; he has just come back from South Africa, and they are going to settle down in London—somewhere in Kensington, I think.'

Did he remember? What a mockery the question was! He smiled in a grim way to himself, as he thought of the unconscious irony of his friend Dundas's remark. Did he remember the girl who came with the Kingsfords? His thoughts wandered back to the bright summer days a year ago, the long afternoons on the river with her, while their boat slept peacefully under the shade of the willows, and the warm wind played a moment with her hair; the soft, cool summer evenings in some old college garden with her, while the coloured lanterns cast fairy shadows from the trees, and snatches of music came floating towards them from the grey and crumbling hall; the dreamy delight of a valse, and the stroll through the cloisters afterwards, with the young moon sending strange shafts of light through the carved windows and sculptured pinnacles above them. Did he remember?

He had known a year ago that she was going to become Kingsford's wife. Had she not told him so herself, in her quiet, calm way, that summer afternoon when he asked, and lost, all that seemed worth having in the world? He smiled bitterly to himself as he thought of that day; of his passionate pleading for her love, and her look of pitying sorrow when she told him she was betrothed already—that, indeed, she would be married as soon as her lover came back to England. Was it not absurd, he asked himself, that a man should be dying of a broken heart in the nineteenth century? Surely we had got over all this sort of thing in the present age. It was almost ridiculous!

But the remarkable fact remained, nevertheless, that Arlon Stassart, a young man of good prospects and intelligence, expecting shortly to be called to the Bar, seemed likely to come to an untimely end owing to misplaced affection. His friends had reasoned with him, expostulated with him, sought to distract him by various amusements, but to no avail. His soul refused to be comforted, and he had sunk into a solitary existence in a little cottage on the Thames, where he still pretended to be reading law, and only rarely appeared in society of any kind.

And here was another remarkable fact: Gladys Meredythe and Stanton Kingsford were actually marrying simply and solely for love. Both were openly and confessedly in love one with the other. Now this, in the present age, was really a remarkable coincidence, and yet, nevertheless, was an undoubted fact. And it helped to increase the already acute anguish felt by the unfortunate Arlon Stassart. His thoughts were becoming almost too painful for him to bear, and he determined to seek some distraction.

It was a bright summer's day; the river was cool and enticing.



He looked at his watch; it was still early. 'I will run into town and fetch that funny little Japanese fellow, Kotaro, for a day on the river with me,' he remarked to himself. 'He is sure to be interesting, and will not, at least, be as commonplace as the average British youth.'

The 'little Japanese fellow,' be it known, was one Kotaro, whom he had known at Oxford, and who was now, like himself, reading for the Bar, but, unlike Stassart, inhabited chambers in the Middle Temple, and did some work. Stassart rang his bell, and a page boy, with a face like a cherub from a mediæval picture, came to the door.

'Raphael,' said his master, 'get the dog-cart ready in five minutes. I am going into town.'

In five minutes the boy with a face like a cherub reappeared, and announced that the cart was ready. Stassart drove rapidly into London; found Kotaro poring over Roman law, and carried him off, not by any means against his will, to Richmond. There he directed Raphael to take the horse and cart back home, and to have dinner ready at eight o'clock.

'By the way, Kotaro, of course you will stay the night with me?' he said. 'I have a spare room always ready, you know.'

'I shall be delighted,' said the Japanese.

'Very well. Raphael, you will see to it. You may go now. Now, Kotaro, let's find my boat, and we'll have a good row up the river.'

Stassart kept a pretty little dingey at Richmond; it was pushed out from the boat-house, and the two young men stepped into it, Stassart taking the oars, while Kotaro settled himself, in an attitude of Oriental repose, amid the cushions in the stern.

Kotaro was aware of his friend's unhappy attachment, and had often tried to cheer his mind by Oriental reflections upon feminine beauty, the folly of confining one's attentions to one girl out of so many thousands, and the general insignificance of all womankind. But Stassart refused to be comforted by thoughts like these, and Kotaro, in his indolent Eastern way, was slightly troubled in his mind. To-day, however, he was possessed with a great idea.

'My friend Stassart,' he remarked, during the afternoon, while they were lying lazily on the bank under a shady tree, having tied up the boat just in front of them, 'I know a doctor of my own country who could cure you of your melancholy and your love.'

Stassart looked up with a mournful but half-amused smile. He liked Kotaro, chiefly because of his habit of prolonged silence, which in this instance had only been broken after an hour of

apparently deep reflection, and also because of his quiet certainty upon various disputed points.

‘Supposing he could, which I doubt, I hardly feel inclined to go to Japan upon an errand of that kind,’ he answered.

‘You need not go to Japan,’ said Kotaro.

‘Where, then, is this wonderful doctor?’ asked Stassart.

‘In London,’ replied the Japanese, ‘not very far from your own house. You shall see him this evening.’

‘But I don’t want to see him,’ said Stassart. ‘He could not do me any good. The only person who could cure me,’ he remarked, with a sigh, ‘is Gladys Meredythe.’

Whereupon the Japanese student smiled in a dreamy way, and said the remarkable words:

‘If that is so, she herself shall cure you. The Mysterious Secret can cause even that to happen.’

‘If that is so,’ answered Stassart, incredulously, ‘the Mysterious Secret, as you call your doctor, will overcome the impossible.’

‘He can overcome it,’ said Kotaro, with much certainty. ‘You shall see him to-night. I will send him a message.’

‘If you like,’ replied Stassart carelessly, thinking that Kotaro was rather amusing with his air of quiet assurance.

The afternoon wore on, until at length it was time to return. When the two men reached Arlon’s house in time for dinner, and were seated at their meal, Kotaro said to Raphael, who was waiting at table:

‘Raphael, did not some one leave a message for your master this afternoon?’

The cherub-faced boy, without a blush, said ‘No sir;’ the fact being that a message had been left, but he had forgotten to give it, and did not wish to betray himself.

The Japanese looked at the page, and said to him, ‘Raphael, you do not speak the truth. Tell your master who came this afternoon.’

The cherub looked unhappy; then, braving it out, answered: ‘Please, sir, a foreign-lookin’ man come this afternoon, and sez to me: “Tell your master,” he sez, “that Amida Sama will come to him this evening, and will cure him.” And I sez to him, “Go ’long,” being as how I thought ’e was makin’ fun of you, sir. And I thought it was not worth while tellin’ you, sir.’

‘You young imp!’ said his master; ‘what business have you to think anything at all? I’ll thrash you myself one of these days, if you are not more careful. Bring in the coffee.’

When the boy had left the room, he asked Kotaro, ‘How

was it the mysterious doctor happened to send that message this afternoon ?’

‘Because I sent him word this afternoon ;’ was the answer.

‘But you did not telegraph or send a note, for you were with me all the time,’ said his host, with a look of surprise.

‘No, I did not,’ said Kotaro. ‘I sent him a thought-message. It is more simple.’

‘Do you mean——?’ began Stassart, in a surprised tone.

‘I mean that, when two people know each other so well as the doctor and myself, we can communicate our thoughts by a mere effort of the will. Why, even your Western thinkers’ (this with deep sarcasm) ‘are beginning to comprehend the possibility of what they call telepathy. Have you not read “Phantoms of the Living”?’

‘Yes,’ replied Stassart ; ‘I think it is nonsense.’

‘So it is,’ replied Kotaro. ‘At least mostly ; for the inquirers know not the principles and elements of the science they are trying to learn. But still they have begun to discover that mind is not bounded by matter ; that is something.’

At this moment Raphael announced that ‘Some one wished to see Mr. Stassart.’ The boy could not give his name, being unable to pronounce it.

‘It is the doctor,’ said Kotaro.

‘Bring him in here,’ said Stassart, ‘and fetch some more coffee and a bottle of Chartreuse.’

The doctor appeared. He was apparently a man of middle age, unobtrusively dressed in European garments, with nothing striking in his appearance except his eyes, which had a fixed watching look about them, as if they were always waiting for some vision.

He said a few words in Japanese to Kotaro, who then introduced him to Arlon Stassart as Amida Sama. After a few formal preliminary remarks, the doctor said to Stassart :

‘Well, Kotaro tells me you are not happy. Let me see what is the matter with you. Let me examine you.’

Mechanically Arlon held out his hand for the doctor to feel his pulse. Amida Sama smiled, and pushed it away, remarking, ‘As if I could not tell without that ! All I want you to do is to look at me.’

Stassart did so, and their eyes met. The young man suddenly felt conscious of a strange sensation. He seemed altogether out of time and space. He felt as if he were in a great void, with nothing near him except the presence of the Japanese doctor, whose eyes seemed calm and fixed, as if in contemplation. He

became conscious—if one may use a paradox—that he was rapidly becoming unconscious, and could make no effort to recover himself.

The spell was broken by the doctor saying, in his quiet voice :

‘It is enough. I understand. You are in love, and your cure can only be effected by the woman you love.’

Stassart laughed, saying, ‘If that is all you can do, Doctor, I could have spared you the trouble of coming to me. What you say is true ; but if she has refused to cure me, what can you do ?’

The doctor looked at him gravely. ‘You do not know me yet,’ he said. ‘Come to my house.’

Stassart hesitated at first ; then decided to go. His curiosity was roused, and he wanted to see the abode of this doctor, with his strange confidence and assurance of manner. He called Raphael, told him to shut up the house and go to bed ; then, taking his latch-key, he went out in the summer’s evening with the two Japanese by his side.

## II.

THEY walked on in silence till the doctor’s house was reached. It was an old-fashioned building, of the Elizabethan type, but not remarkable in any way in its appearance. It was rather irregularly built, and a long wing on the west side seemed as if it had been constructed more recently than the other portion. The whole house was concealed from prying eyes by a high paling, inside which the thickly planted trees and shrubs formed a protecting screen of no small size. The doctor touched an electric knob outside the house, and the door immediately flew open, and the three men walked in. No servant was to be seen, and the door shut again of its own accord. They proceeded up an old oak staircase, under the light of a huge Chinese lantern that cast a crimson glow over their faces, and after passing through a corridor came apparently to a blank wall. The doctor pressed his finger against some spot which Stassart could not quite see, and, as before, a door flew open, admitted them, and then shut firmly of its own accord. Stassart now found himself in a lofty room, the ceiling and walls of which were decorated in Oriental arabesques, and which was lighted by lamps of carved brass-work of great rarity. Along the walls were hung some Japanese paper pictures inscribed with mystic characters, and apparently representing passages in the life of Buddha. The heavy and richly embroidered hangings and the soft matting that lay at their feet prevented any sound from



being heard either inside or outside the room. But there was nothing specially remarkable in the room itself. It was fitted up in Eastern style, and that was all. There was only one thing that struck Stassart as noticeable, and that was the intense heat, which at first almost prevented him from breathing, but afterwards seemed to fill him with extraordinary vitality and exhilaration, so that his senses felt keener, and his whole being seemed to participate more eagerly in the enjoyment of existence. Amida Sama pointed to a divan, and begged Stassart and Kotaro to be seated. 'I hope,' he remarked to Stassart, 'that you do not find the room too hot?'

'Not now,' said Stassart; 'but at first I confess I thought it stifling. But why do you keep up this temperature?'

'Because it is necessary for my experiments,' answered the doctor, 'and also because it stimulates the perceptions and increases the vitality of the mental faculties.' Seeing that Stassart looked at him inquiringly, he went on: 'Heat, you already know, is the main principle of life, and is necessary to a high order of existence. The great difficulty is always to procure heat, without at the same time causing it to be oppressive. Here, in England, you are not accustomed to what may be called pure heat: it is always mixed with moisture, or is rendered sultry by clouds or the thickness of the air. But in this room the air is rarefied and heated at the same time; for I require the air to be pure in order that the disembodied soul may live, and not suffer from being dissociated from the body. For it is on this subject that I am now making experiments.'

'What do you mean?' exclaimed Stassart, wonderingly, while even Kotaro expressed some surprise.

'I mean this,' answered Amida Sama quietly: 'that I have discovered a means of completely dissociating the soul from the body, so that it may be entirely unfettered by the bonds of the flesh.'

'But that is impossible!' said Stassart. 'That can only occur at death.'

The doctor smiled. 'If you will trust me entirely,' he said—'mind, I say entirely and unreservedly—I think I can prove it to you in your own case.'

Stassart's curiosity was thoroughly roused by the doctor's manner. Besides, the doctor had given no explanation of his method, and spoke about it as if he were communicating the most ordinary experiment in physical science. All this helped to impress the young man. But still he hesitated.

'But, Doctor, I do not know——' he began.

‘As yet, no,’ was the answer; ‘nor can I tell you till I have seen first the nature of your soul. For with some, experiment is easy and safe—they respond readily to my commands; with others I can act only with difficulty and danger. But tell me,’ he said, as if changing the subject, ‘would you like to see the one you love?’

‘Yes,’ answered the young man, eagerly, ‘it is my dearest wish. But I do not even know whether she is in London or in the country.’

‘That matters not,’ replied Amida Sama. ‘Look at me, and think only of her.’

Stassart leaned back on the divan, and gazed fixedly into the doctor’s eyes. Almost immediately he felt the strange sensation he had experienced when they first met. Again he seemed to be in a great empty space, with only those calm eyes gazing into his. He became for a moment unconscious, and then——

Then his heart gave a great leap of joy, as he saw Gladys Meredythe. For he was looking into a room in an old country house, where the open windows, twined with trailing ivy, looked out on to a garden sleeping in the silence of a summer night. At one of the windows that opened out into the garden stood a young girl with her face upturned watching the stars. A smile of sweet contentment was on her lips as she murmured softly the refrain of a love song :

True love from o’er the sea,  
Come back to me, come back to me!  
True love from o’er the sea,  
Come back, and make this loving heart thy home.

Then clasping her hands with a quick motion of pleasure, she exclaimed :

‘Only a week to-day and I shall see him!’

Stassart felt as he looked at her a keen sensation of jealousy. He saw the expression of love on her face, and knew it was not for him. He almost wished the Japanese doctor had not been the means of recalling to his mind all his love and all his hopelessness. Then he felt his whole being dominated by the one idea: ‘If only she were mine! mine alone, with no one else to claim her!’ Then again he seemed to become unconscious. For the fraction of a second he thought he saw the Japanese doctor watching a sleeping figure, while Kotaro looked on with awe-struck interest. But he was not sure that it was not some passing fancy. When he came to himself he was lying on the divan, still gazing into the eyes of Amida Sama, and Kotaro was smoking a curiously-wrought

hookah, whose fumes spread a subtle Eastern perfume through the pure air.

'Ah!' exclaimed Amida Sama, carelessly, as if Stassart had just quitted the room, 'you have come back, then?'

'Well, Doctor,' answered the young man, rather surprised, 'I did not know I had been away. Have I been dreaming?'

'No, you have not been away; but your soul for a few moments left your body. Did I not tell you that I had discovered the means whereby this was rendered possible? You were sceptical, and I took a simple means of proving to you the truth of my assertion. Only I confess to you that I did not leave your soul entirely free, but recalled it before you were out of the sphere of my influence.'

'What strange power, then, do you possess, that you are thus able to control the souls of men?' asked Stassart, in an awe-struck tone.

'I will explain to you,' answered the Japanese doctor; 'but do not think that it is anything very extraordinary. I confess I have gone a step further than some of my predecessors; but that is all. I am not going to claim for myself any magical powers. What I have done and what I have discovered is only a little more than some of your own inquirers into occult science have succeeded in producing. You have heard already,' he continued, smiling a little at the wondering look upon the young man's face, 'of the apparently mysterious results produced by what is called mesmerism, hypnotism, thought-reading, thought-transference, telepathy—call it by what name you will, the underlying principle is in all cases the same; that is to say, these effects are produced by a knowledge of the power of psychical over physical forces. The laws which govern their action are as yet imperfectly understood, although some of your savants can even now produce marvellous effects; but what is quite certain is that the soul and the body, the psychical and the physical sides of man, so closely interwoven in most conditions of our daily life, can under certain circumstances be partly, or even totally, dissociated, and can be made to act separately. You know that the body of a mesmeric patient is so dissociated from his actual self that you can beat it, stab it, and subject it to most acute pain, without the "self" of the patient perceiving or feeling it in the least. And why? Because the soul of the patient is partially dissociated from his body, and is under the complete control of the operator, who can give to it any personality he wishes. He can turn a devotee into a reveller, or a criminal into a saint,

and the body will not be aware of any difference. Well, now, if this can be carried further, why can we not so totally dissociate body and soul that a man's self—his ego, his psychical side—can be made quite free, while his body lies like a useless skin that a butterfly has cast off as it emerges from the chrysalis? Some men have been able to do this in their own case: they have so worn out and suppressed the body by continual fastings, penances, and contemplations, that at length their spirit has departed from it for a time, and has seen unutterable things. Think you that all the stories of the trances and hallucinations of devotees are false and empty fabrications? They may not in every case be true, but they point to the one great central fact—the dissociation of the soul and body.'

The doctor paused a moment, as if to see whether Stassart was following his remarks, and, seeing that he was listening with the utmost attention, proceeded :

'I soon became able in my own case to dissociate my soul from its corporeal envelope, though it caused me many a fast and vigil, many a sore and bitter penance. I got myself into the state of the fakirs, the yonghis, the devotees of Buddha, who sit for years in one fixed constrained position, with hardly enough to keep themselves alive, while their soul wanders through the trackless paths of infinity in its awful contemplations. But this toilsome method did not satisfy me, and I sought some other way of breaking the links that bound my spirit to my flesh. And I found the solution of my difficulty in the exercise of the will in its fullest sense. I put my body into an hypnotic lethargy by the mechanical means adopted by the ordinary professors of the mesmeric art, but by a supreme effort of the will retained my mental faculties unaffected. I felt as men feel sometimes in dreams: their body is asleep, while their mind is active in a world of its own creating. Then by a final exercise of volition my spirit escaped for a time from its earthly prison; I lived, acted, and felt, unfettered by the clogging limitations of my flesh. After a time I found I could in this way quit and re-enter my body at will, and my pleasures were enhanced a thousandfold. Only one thing I noticed, and that was that it was necessary for the successful performance of my experiment that the temperature of the air at the time I left or re-entered my body should be at least as high as the internal heat of the body itself; otherwise the mental faculties became dull and inert, and my self, or ego, seemed to lose a portion of its exuberant vitality. Now you will see,' concluded the doctor, 'how easy it is for me to perform the same experiment upon another man,



provided only that his will is weaker than mine, or that he is taken, as it were, unawares, and before he has time to exercise it. I have only to put his body into an hypnotic lethargy, and then by my own power of will make his soul leave its physical habitation. For a short time I can control its actions, but of course it is impossible for me to keep my will fixed in the necessary intensity for more than a comparatively short space of time. That was why I controlled your spirit in its journey just now, and recalled it before the control was exhausted.'

The doctor stopped speaking, and proceeded to smoke quietly from a scented hookah. Arlon Stassart remained silent. He was amazed and awe-struck before this example of scientific daring, this illustration of the immense power of volition. He saw in this simple discovery tremendous possibilities of good or evil to those around him, and felt almost dismayed at the contemplation of the cool courage displayed by this quiet Japanese savant, who could take a man's soul out of his body, and replace it, as if he were merely performing a surgical operation. For some time he was absorbed in his thoughts; but at length, turning to Amida Sama, he said :

'What you have told me, Doctor, is extremely wonderful; the more so, I think, because of its simplicity, and from the fact that it is, after all, the logical outcome of recent researches into psychological phenomena so little understood among us. I am almost afraid,' he continued, with a laugh, 'to remain in this room. But tell me, Amida Sama, how do you propose to win Gladys Meredythe for me by the aid of this discovery?'

'Ah! there comes a slight difficulty,' answered the doctor. 'What I propose is simple enough in itself, if only the requisite preliminaries for the experiment can be arranged. I propose to transfer your soul—your self—to the body of her *fiancé*—by the way, you have not yet told me his name—while *his* soul will inhabit your body. You will thus be free to approach your beloved as if you were her betrothed, and enjoy all the happy intercourse of lovers. Of course your actions, after you have once been transferred to the body of her lover, must lie entirely in your own hands, and that I must leave to you.'

Stassart had already by this time become so much under the fascination of the doctor's teaching and disclosures that this astonishing proposition did not, at the time, strike him as very extraordinary. The only thing that made him hesitate was the difficulty of effecting the transformation between himself and Kingsford. He began to say so :

‘But how are we to get Kingsford—for that is her lover’s name—to consent to this proposal?’ asked he.

Whereupon the silent Kotaro stopped smoking, and, deliberately laying down the stem of his hookah, began to laugh.

‘What are you laughing at, Kotaro?’ asked Stassart, rather angrily.

‘Your Western simplicity of ideas,’ answered Kotaro, composedly.

‘Of course Kingsford would not consent. But I think the doctor said consent was not necessary, if only he had the opportunity of controlling his patient’s will, while the patient was not actively opposing his exercise of volition.’

‘If you will bring Mr. Kingsford here,’ the doctor remarked, as if he were talking about some interesting scientific attempt, ‘I will cause his soul to leave his body, and change its earthly habitation with yours.’

Once again Stassart hesitated. Was it not, after all, rather an underhand piece of work, this contemplated change of identity? What would Kingsford’s feelings be when he discovered the transformation? But, as to that, what were his own feelings now? What had he not suffered during the past year for his love of Gladys? Now, at last, was an opportunity to win and enjoy her love—the love he had so long and so vainly desired. What if he gained it by assuming a false identity? She would think he was Kingsford, and would not discover that another self inhabited her lover’s form. And Kingsford?—well, why should not he, Arlon Stassart, have happiness as well as her favoured lover? His passion urged him on; some lingering sense of honour held him back. He was yet undecided, when once again Kotaro broke the silence:

‘Love in these Western lands,’ he remarked to Amida Sama, with the air of one who was stating an extremely interesting, though somewhat obvious, fact of philosophic investigation, ‘is greatly affected by the coolness and moisture of the climate. There is a lack of concentrated passion about it that renders it occasionally insipid. Now, Miss Meredythe——’

Here Stassart broke in, exclaiming, ‘Doctor, you shall make the experiment. I will bring Stanton Kingsford to your house before the week is over.’

Amida Sama answered, with a mild air of benignant approval, ‘That is very good. It will be a most interesting experiment.’

‘Yes it will,’ remarked Stassart, ‘d——d interesting;’ and after a little while went home thoughtfully, with Kotaro smoking quietly by his side.

## III.

THE difficulty which now lay in Stassart's path was to arrange a meeting between Kingsford and the Japanese doctor at the latter's house. Stassart had known Kingsford pretty well, especially since leaving Oxford, where Kingsford was a year senior to him; but they had not corresponded since Gladys' lover had gone out to South Africa a year ago in order to carry out some investigations on behalf of a proposed gold-mining company. He thought over the matter a long time, and one or two days had already passed before he could find out a means. He was so conscious of his own ulterior designs, that he sought for some excuse to invite Stanton Kingsford to his house on the Thames, an excuse that would sound natural and matter-of-fact even after the long interval caused by his rival's voyage to the Cape. It did not strike him till he had wasted some time in devising various futile plans that it would be the most natural, and, indeed, friendly, thing to invite Kingsford to his house for a night, just because they had not seen each other for so long. He laughed at himself for his own stupidity, and, hastily seizing pen and ink, wrote off a friendly note to Kingsford, who, he had already learnt, was in rooms near his *fiancée's* house in Kensington, to which Gladys had returned from the country. The answer came in a day or two, and was of a very cordial nature. Somehow or other Stassart felt a little ashamed of the part he was playing, but, having begun the game, did not like to draw back. He sent Raphael with a note to Amida Sama, to say that he wished him to come and dine with him on the following Tuesday evening, when he expected Kingsford would be staying the night at his house. He did not tell the cherub-faced page that he expected a visitor to sleep the night on that occasion; he did not wish the boy to think anything extraordinary was to happen.

On Tuesday evening Stanton Kingsford arrived in time for an eight-o'clock dinner, at which he was introduced to a quiet little man of somewhat foreign appearance, who, Stassart whispered to him, was an Eastern savant sent over on a scientific mission from the Japanese Government. The quiet little man had spent a short time in the Cape Colony, and proved a most interesting companion. He, too, like Kingsford, knew something about the gold and diamond mines there.

'I have some rather interesting specimens of mineral ores,' he remarked casually during dinner to Kingsford; 'I think you

might like to see them. I should like your opinion upon their value.'

'By all means,' answered Kingsford. 'I should be very glad to see them. Where are they?'

'I will show them to you if you will come over to my house after dinner,' answered the Japanese; 'it is only a few minutes' walk from here.'

'Will you come, Stassart?' asked the young man of his host.

'Oh! yes, of course, if you care to see these specimens,' answered Stassart. 'And perhaps, Doctor, you will give us a cup of coffee in Japanese fashion, and then we need not wait for it here,' he added.

'With pleasure,' replied the doctor.

So, dinner being over, the two young men went out with Amida Sama, Stassart first telling Raphael that he need not wait, and that he was to call him at half-past eight next morning. Arrived at the doctor's house, they examined some curious specimens of minerals and some Cape diamonds of peculiar purity and brilliancy, and then went to the study where Stassart had first been initiated into the strange discovery that was to affect his whole life. Lounging on luxurious divans, Stassart and Kingsford sipped their coffee, smoked their cigars, and listened with interest to an account that Amida Sama was giving them of some recent experiments upon hypnotic subjects in Paris.

'What you tell us is most interesting, Doctor,' said Kingsford. 'I wish I could see some of these experiments performed.'

'Nothing more easy,' answered Amida Sama. 'I could do them myself here, if I only had a willing subject. Will not one of you two friends sacrifice himself for the other?' he asked, with a smile, as if he were desirous of complying with his guest's wish.

'Well,' remarked Stassart, as if hesitating, 'if you promise not to make me do anything very ridiculous while I am under your influence, I would not mind obliging Kingsford's curiosity.'

'Very good, then,' said the doctor. 'Lie down on the divan.'

He then made a few ordinary mesmeric passes, and of course, as Stassart was a perfectly willing subject, soon put him into a state of mesmeric coma, in which condition he made Stassart repeat poems in Japanese and Hindustani, answer questions of which in his normal state he could not possibly know the answers, and do several other acts familiar enough to those acquainted with the tricks of ordinary mesmerists, but quite new to Kingsford. Then, releasing the young man from his influence, he asked Kingsford if he also would like to be hypnotised.



‘If you like,’ answered he, readily enough; ‘but do you think I am a good subject?’

‘That depends entirely on yourself,’ answered Amida. ‘If you trust yourself to me, and do not attempt to think or exercise any volition, I have no doubt I can hypnotise you.’

‘Very well, then,’ answered Kingsford, with a laugh, ‘I will put myself entirely in your hands.’ And he resigned himself to the doctor’s influence.

It was soon done. Aided by the young man’s unsuspecting confidence, Amida Sama cast him into a complete hypnotic lethargy, and obtained entire mastery over his will. Kingsford lay motionless and apparently lifeless on the couch. Then hastily turning to Stassart, the doctor bade him lie down also, cast him likewise into a trance, and in a few moments stood thoughtfully before these two young men, so completely under his power, their volition voluntarily surrendered to his.

‘It will be a most interesting experiment,’ he remarked to himself.

He made a few more motions with his hands, then concentrated the whole force of his powerful will upon his two subjects. No visible change took place. Only, after a few moments of evidently great effort on the part of the doctor, a slight tremor shook the frame of Stassart, then communicated itself to the body of Kingsford. Both men simultaneously drew a deep breath. Then all was still. Amida Sama fell back exhausted upon his divan, and great drops of perspiration stood upon his forehead. A silence as of death reigned throughout the room.

After a time the Japanese rose up, and placing his hand upon Kingsford’s forehead, stroked it gently, as a nurse would soothe an invalid child. The eyes opened, and the young man sat up.

‘Doctor,’ he asked eagerly, ‘is it done?’

‘Look in this mirror,’ was the answer, ‘you will see.’ Kingsford’s body, now inhabited by the personality of Stassart, rose and looked at the glass. Then he turned towards the couch and gazed at the still sleeping figure. Stassart felt a curious sensation. He saw *himself*; not as he so often before had done, as a man sees himself in a mirror regarding himself with his own eyes, but he saw himself as he appeared to others—as he actually was in daily life. Yet that body was his no longer. All the world would think him to be Kingsford. It was a strange idea; it even struck him as having a slightly comic side to it, and he laughed in grim amusement.

‘We must get him back to your house,’ said the doctor, and then you can go to his rooms, in his person.’

Kingsford, in Stassart’s form, was still under hypnotic influence, and mechanically obeyed the doctor’s command to get up and walk. The two placed him between them, and proceeded towards the house they had left a few hours before. There they placed the sleeping form in Stassart’s bed, and quietly departed without awaking anyone in the building. Then Stassart-Kingsford—for we must give him this double name—returned to the doctor’s house till it was time to catch the first morning train to London; and arriving in town, took a hansom to Kingsford’s rooms in Kensington, and let himself in with a latch-key which he found in the suit that his changed personality was wearing.

#### IV.

THE first thing that Stassart-Kingsford sought to do was, naturally, after the somewhat exciting events of the evening, to find his bedroom and turn in. Here a practical difficulty arose, for he had only been in the house once before, and then only in the sitting-room. However, he took a candle which stood on the hall-table, and proceeded quietly upstairs till he saw a door slightly ajar where the gas was still burning. Luckily it proved to be his friend’s room, for he saw on the dressing-table a letter or two addressed to ‘S. Kingsford, Esq., 250 Edith Terrace, Kensington, W.,’ which set his doubts at rest, and he turned into bed with a sigh of relief. He slept soundly till the maidservant called him next morning at eight; then arose, dressed, and went down to breakfast. On the table he found two letters—one in a girl’s writing, which he guessed instinctively was from Gladys, and another evidently from a masculine hand. He opened this the first, and read the following little note:

‘Aug. 20, 1887.

‘My dear Stanton,—Just a line to send you my best and kindest wishes for your approaching happiness. I am in a great hurry, but hope to look in and see you in a day or two. Meanwhile, please accept the enclosed as my wedding-gift.—Your affectionate uncle,

‘J. L. S.

‘P.S.—When is the “happy day”?’

The enclosure was a cheque for five hundred pounds. Stassart felt most perplexed. Here was some old uncle of Kingsford’s writing a letter, and forgetting to put any name or address to it.

It required, of course, a grateful answer; but how could he write one? It really was rather awkward. He turned to open the other letter, which smote him with a pang of jealousy. It was from Gladys, asking her lover to be sure to come that morning at half-past eleven, and take her into town to shop, and ending: 'If you come in good time I will give you—you know what.—Your own loving Gladys.'

With such a prospect in view, the transformed Stassart lost no time in setting out to see his former love. He hailed a passing hansom, and soon arrived at a pretty little semi-detached house in Kensington. Dismissing the driver, he inquired for Miss Meredith, and was shown into a quiet morning-room while the servant went to announce his arrival. Stassart looked round the room, and caught sight of himself in a mirror which stood above the mantelpiece. Although he was, so to say, in the secret of his transformation, he could hardly repress a start of surprise as he saw the face of Stanton Kingsford looking out at him. He was gazing at himself, and yet he saw someone else. But this thought did not trouble him very long. He was about to see once more his adored Gladys, and this time she would not repulse him. The thought gave him a feeling of exquisite triumph and of still more exquisite anticipation. But even in the midst of his victory the timidity of true love made him, for the moment, feel as nervous as if he were still the rejected suitor, Arlon Stassart. The entry of the maid-servant gave a sudden shock to the thoughts that were agitating his mind. At her approach he could not repress a sudden start; his heart almost stopped beating when the girl uttered the commonplace announcement:

'Miss Gladys will be ready in a minute.'

But she had hardly left the room again before the door opened, and Gladys herself appeared, ready dressed for a morning's walk. Arlon for half a second hesitated, and then, feeling how foolish it was that in his position of accepted lover he should still have the thoughts and sensations of a despised suitor, stepped towards her and caught her eagerly in his arms, while his whole soul seemed to pour itself forth in the impassioned kiss he pressed upon his darling's lips.

It was very strange, but even at this apparently quite ordinary proceeding on the part of her supposed lover, some delicate sensitiveness, some divine warning of the instinct of affection, seemed to pass over Gladys's mind like an intuition, unfounded perhaps, but none the less real.

She drew back rather hastily, and, coldly returning his salute,

remarked, with some degree of asperity, 'I wish you would not be so rough, Stanton; you are quite spoiling my hat. Let us go out for our walk now.'

'Why are you in such a hurry to go out, darling?' expostulated the supposed Stanton; 'I have hardly seen you yet. Is there anything particular you want to buy immediately? Why this haste to go out?' And he once more stepped towards her, as if to embrace her.

'No more kisses, sir,' said Gladys, playfully. 'If you want one very much, I'll give you one when we have got what you promised me. Shall we go and get it?'

Arlon felt bewildered at this. What had he—or, rather, Kingsford—promised his future bride? It was rather awkward that his ignorance of small details should show itself so early in the proceedings. However, he determined to put the best face on it he could, and answered: 'Of course, dear, we will start at once, if you like.' He was about to ask her where they should go, but reflected this would betray an unseemly forgetfulness. To his horror, she asked the question herself:

'Well, then, let us go. But where are you going to take me to choose it?'

'To choose what?' he asked, unguardedly, and then could have almost kicked himself at the *bêtise* he displayed.

'My dear Stanton,' said his lady-love, in a surprised tone of voice, 'surely you can't have forgotten?'

'Oh! no, darling,' replied the agonised representative of Kingsford, 'I haven't forgotten, only I was thinking of something else. Let me see. We were going to choose a ring, were we not?'

This was about the most unfortunate thing he could have said. Unluckily Kingsford and Miss Meredythe had chosen that indispensable accompaniment of matrimonial happiness the day before. Gladys looked at him in amazement.

'Stanton, what *is* the matter with you this morning?' she cried. 'Why, we did that yesterday. What has made you so absent-minded? Are you quite well? You don't seem quite yourself to-day, somehow.'

'No,' thought Arlon, 'I am not myself. I am somebody else; and I begin to wish I wasn't. I must say something. I'll say I'm not well.' 'I'm not quite the thing to-day, Gladys,' he said aloud. 'I had a return of that beastly sunstroke I had in Africa again yesterday afternoon, and my head feels rather queer still.'

'Oh! I'm so sorry,' said Gladys. 'What a strange boy you



are! You never told me before you had had a sunstroke when in Africa.'

'Didn't I, dear?' said her lover. 'I did not like to bother you about a little thing like that, you see. Never mind, Gladys, I'm all right again now, only I can't remember what I promised you to-day. What was it, dear?'

The subterfuge worked very well this time, and Gladys unsuspectingly answered:

'You said you would take me to the City, and we would choose a setting for that lovely Kimberley diamond you brought me.'

'Oh! of course,' answered Arlon. 'What a fool I was to forget it! Have you got it with you?'

'No,' said Gladys, with considerable surprise, 'of course not. I asked you to take care of it for me, Stanton. And I do wish,' she added, with ever so slight a touch of petulance, 'that you would try and collect your thoughts a little.'

'When I am thinking of you, dear,' began Stassart, with a loving air, 'I seem to forget everything else.'

But Gladys did not seem to care for this pretty speech. She was becoming rather perplexed with her lover's strange manner; and besides, Stanton never used to go in for that kind of complimentary trifling with her.

Stassart, too, began to grow uneasy at the turn affairs were taking. What was this wretched diamond? and where was it to be found? 'Probably Kingsford has it locked up in his rooms,' he thought, 'and I shall have to go back for it. Anyway, I must find it.' Turning to Gladys, he said, penitently:

'I am sorry I'm so stupid, darling. I left it in my rooms. We can call and get it on our way to the City.'

'All right, Stanton dear,' answered Gladys, cheerfully. 'It won't be much out of our way; and I dropped something out of my pocket when I was there yesterday—a note to Eva, you know. Did you see it? We can look for it as well.'

So they went out, and seeing a hansom, Stassart hailed it, and they drove rapidly towards Edith Terrace. Arriving there, Gladys said she would get out and look for her note while Stassart was seeking the diamond. She went into his sitting-room, and her lover rushed upstairs, wondering where that unfortunate jewel was to be found.

'I expect the beggar has locked it up in his dressing-case,' he thought to himself. 'Most likely place. One of these keys is sure to fit it;' and he pulled out a bunch of keys from the pocket of the suit he was wearing. He soon found the key of the dressing-case,

but, alas ! the diamond was not there. He hunted high and low, but could not find it. Meanwhile Gladys had found the note she dropped, and was becoming impatient. Looking round the room to while away the time, she noticed a letter lying open on the table, and beside it a cheque for 500*l.*, which Stassart had carelessly left lying about. The letter, she saw at a glance, was from a relative of Kingsford's, but she did not remember to whom the initials J. L. S. belonged.

'It's very good of him, though, whoever it is, to send us such a nice wedding-gift,' she remarked to herself. 'But where can Stanton be all this time? Something certainly seems to have gone wrong this morning.'

At last Stanton—or, to be more correct, Stassart in his shape—appeared with rueful looks. He was very sorry, quite ashamed of himself, but he must confess he could not remember where he had put that diamond. Would Gladys come with him and choose another?

'Oh! never mind, dear,' answered she, though a shade of disappointment crossed her fair brow. 'It does not matter to-day, and, perhaps, if we wait a day or two, it will turn up. We will go for a walk instead, shall we? We hardly have time, after all, to go to the City before lunch, you know. You will lunch with us to-day, Stanton, won't you?' she said, with a sweet smile, that made the somewhat dismayed Stassart feel rather penitent at the part he was playing.

'Yes, darling,' he answered, eagerly, 'I shall be delighted to do so. But won't you let me get you another diamond? I really ought to make amends for my carelessness.'

'No, I would rather you did not—at least, not to-day,' replied Gladys; for, to tell the truth, she felt a little hurt at his carelessness, and not quite so eager to make a long shopping expedition that morning. 'I think I should like a walk in the Park better. And—and—I don't care much about diamonds, anyhow,' she added, with a little pout, that, to Stassart's enraptured eyes, made her appear more charming than ever, though he was secretly afraid that the harmony of the proceedings was not quite so secure as might be wished. But he thought he had better say no more about it, and allowed Gladys to lead the way out of his rooms into the road towards the Park.

'How delightful it is to be walking with you again, Gladys!' he remarked. 'It seems ages since I saw you last.'

'And yet it was only yesterday,' she answered, 'that we took the very same walk. It used to be very lonely for me when you

were away. I only had auntie to walk with then, and she goes slowly.'

'Ah! darling, it was even more lonely for me,' answered Stassart, acting up to his part. And, indeed, this remark was perfectly true, and he felt he was on pretty safe ground here. He thought he had better improve the occasion. 'I sometimes think,' he went on, 'that if it had not been for your dear letters I should have gone mad.'

'Don't talk rubbish, Stanton!' said Gladys, with a pleased little laugh, however. 'By the way, you had a letter this morning, had you not? And a wedding-present in it, too, I think.'

'Oh, yes!' said Stassart, 'from my uncle. He sent us 500*l*.'

'Wasn't it nice of him?' said Gladys. 'But which of your uncles was it? You have so many, you know.'

'Have I?' thought Stassart to himself; 'I didn't know that before. I suppose I must make a guess at one of them.' 'It was Uncle James,' he said aloud, making a wild guess. 'The fellow's initial was J., anyhow,' he thought.

'Why, Uncle James sent us those blue vases only yesterday,' remarked Miss Meredythe, with some surprise. 'Are you *sure* it was Uncle James?' she asked, doubtfully.

'Oh, yes!' said Stassart, confidently, 'it was Uncle James, sure enough. It's just like him to do that kind of thing.'

'Well, yesterday, you know, Stanton, you called him an old skinflint, because he only sent us a pair of five-shilling vases, and you said that was just like his meanness.'

'I confess I misjudged him,' answered her lover. 'He has shown up better since then. Shall we sit down in the Park a little?' he continued, rather anxious to change a subject which might lead him into fresh difficulties. They were about to do so when Stassart suddenly found himself face to face with his own personality, in which the identity of Stanton Kingsford was unwillingly concealed. But to explain this most unfortunate *contre-temps* I must ask you to return to the little cottage on the Thames where we first met Arlon Stassart.

## V.

KINGSFORD, in the personality of Stassart, had been placed in the bed of his rival, and slept quietly and unsuspectingly till the next morning. On waking he, naturally, opened his eyes and looked around him. He saw a room, simply but tastefully fur-

nished, with clean white curtains, through which the morning sun was shining brightly, while not very far off could be heard the rustle of trees mingling with the quiet flow of the waters that ran beneath their shade. A good-looking page boy was just entering the room, bearing his master's hot water.

Seeing the young man was awake, Raphael asked the usual question: 'Shall I order breakfast now, sir?' and was much astonished at receiving the unwonted reply:

'Who the devil are you?'

With a look of alarm, he answered: 'Please, sir, it's only me, sir—Raphael.'

'But what are you doing here? and where am I?' asked the young man, looking round the unfamiliar room.

'Marster must have been taken very bad last night,' remarked Raphael to himself. 'I knows two gents had to put him to bed, 'cos I heard 'em tramping up the stairs.' Aloud he remarked, soothingly: 'It's all right, Mr. Stassart, sir; shall I get you some soda-water, sir?' for the cherub knew the efficacy of that beverage in similar cases.

Kingsford began dimly to perceive that something was wrong, and determined to get up and dress. He told Raphael to go out, and have breakfast ready in twenty minutes, and, as soon as the boy had left the room, he went up to the looking-glass. To his surprise, he saw therein the face of Arlon Stassart. He turned angrily away and looked over his shoulder, thinking that perhaps he had spent the night at his friend's house, and that Stassart had just come into the room to greet him. Of course he saw nobody. He rushed to the window. Instead of the noisy London street, with the milk-boy and the grocer's cart, he saw a pleasant little garden, sloping gently towards the river that murmured at the end of the lawn. He turned to the glass again, and rubbed his eyes. Still the face of Arlon Stassart. The perplexed Kingsford began to remember strange stories of mesmeric influences, and to recall the experience of the previous evening. He remembered reading a German tale that told of a ghost appearing in the form of another person. It was evident that he was not, to the eyes of outsiders, Stanton Kingsford. On the contrary, he was a friend of his own, one Stassart, whom he had known at Oxford, and whom Gladys had once spoken about as being a rather too ardent admirer. Ah! Gladys—that might—— Good heavens! had Stassart, then, changed his personality by some devilish piece of mesmeric jugglery? Was he even now with Gladys—embracing her, kissing those sweet lips, while she was resting confidently in

his arms, as in those of her real lover? The thought made his heart beat wildly, the blood rush hotly to his forehead. He must go and see her—break in between them—thwart Stassart in the midst of his triumph! He began to dress feverishly, and hastened downstairs. Here he found Raphael waiting for him, and the breakfast ready on the table, with three or four letters beside his plate. I do not suppose he ate much breakfast—would you have done so in a similar situation? Suppose your ancient rival for the affections of Miss Brown had played a practical joke of this description upon you? Would *you* have sat calmly down to the matutinal egg and the early morning toast, while it was possible that your charmer was resting in the embrace of that low fellow Jones? Perish the thought! Would you not have rushed madly to her house, and confronted the villain J. in her very presence? yea, pulled his nose, and thrust him down the front-door steps? That is what Kingsford would have liked to do, and such were the thoughts that were passing through his anxious brain. Only there was a very great difficulty in the way—*no one would believe he was himself*, and it would only appear to all as if he were the once rejected Stassart creating an unseemly *fracas* in the house of his former inamorata. But he determined he would not be baffled by an obstacle such as this. He would be cool; he would not attack his rival in her presence; he would talk to her when she was alone, and convince her that he, and no other, was her real *fiancé*, and that Stassart had only borrowed his personality in order to steal a mean advantage. With these thoughts in his mind, he called Raphael, and told him to bring him his hat and gloves, walked hastily to the station, found a train for West Kensington, and, after what seemed to him an endless journey, at length arrived there. He first went to his own rooms, and inquired for himself—asked if Mr. Kingsford were in? Humiliating position! thus to tacitly have to acknowledge his rival's success. His good landlady told him that 'Mr. Kingsford' had just been into his rooms with Miss Meredythe, and that, after a few minutes, they had gone out again for a walk. 'Mr. Kingsford' had said he would not be in for lunch.

The real Kingsford strolled sadly away, and his footsteps led him naturally towards the Park, where he had so often taken those pleasant morning walks with Gladys. Now she was walking with Stassart. Poor Kingsford began to understand, to a very harassing degree, the feelings of Othello after Iago's good-natured tale-bearing. His agonies were by no means decreased when he caught sight of Gladys and Stassart strolling quietly along a shady path, and evidently looking for a seat. 'Shall I speak to them?'

thought Kingsford, hesitatingly. 'Oh! I must—I must! I cannot see her walking by his side so confidently and trustfully, and not interfere. I will let him see that his trick will not be altogether successful.' He approached them, and, raising his hat, said politely: 'Good morning, Miss Meredythe. I hope you have not forgotten me.' He took no notice of the traitor by her side.

'Oh no, Mr. Stassart,' answered Gladys, cordially; 'I am very glad to meet you again. Why, it must be more than a year ago since we met last, is it not? Don't you know Mr. Kingsford? Allow me to introduce——'

'Oh! of course we know each other,' interrupted Stassart, the personifier of Kingsford, eager to prevent any accidental disturbance of their relations, for he saw that his rival understood the change of identity. 'I dined with him last night. Did you not see me, Stassart? You did not seem to recognise me.'

'Thank you,' replied the real Kingsford, coldly; 'I recognised you perfectly.' Then, turning to Gladys, who was utterly astonished at this rude behaviour of one friend to another with whom he had dined the night before, he remarked, as if casually, 'Do you believe in mesmerism, Miss Meredythe?'

'I don't know exactly what you mean by "believing" in it,' she answered, still more surprised at the abruptness of the question, and at his evident earnestness of manner. 'I know it can produce some very extraordinary results.'

'Oh! I think it's all nonsense,' broke in Stassart, who began to feel that his rival, though under the disadvantage of not being himself, was treading on dangerous ground. 'You will generally find it can all be explained away. I knew a man in South Africa, Gladys——'

'No one, sir, asked you to elucidate the matter with any of your own experiences,' said Kingsford, in a most frigid tone. Gladys looked uncomfortably at the supposed Mr. Stassart, and wondered how he could be so rude. She tried to make peace.

'Have you come across anything of particular interest in that kind of thing, Mr. Stassart?' she asked, in a kindly tone. 'You seem to be interested in the subject.'

'I am,' said poor Kingsford, 'deeply interested. My whole life and happiness have been threatened by it. You see before you the victim of a mesmeric trick.' Gladys looked bewildered. 'You will hardly believe,' he went on, 'what I am going to tell you——'

'Oh! look here, Stassart,' said the real owner of the name, 'we don't want any of your long-winded tales of wonder now,'

‘No,’ said Kingsford, at last losing his patience at this interruption, ‘you don’t. It would expose you, traitor, coward, villain that you are!’ He fairly shouted these words in his frenzy of excitement.

‘I’m not going to stand this kind of thing from any man,’ replied Stassart, who, however, kept pretty cool, feeling that he had the best of the situation. But he thought it better to appear very excited. ‘If you are going to call people names in a public place like this, you will only get into trouble. Why, you are attracting a crowd already. Gladys,’ he continued, with much dignity, ‘let us come away;’ and he moved off, with the frightened girl holding his arm, while he whispered to her: ‘Stassart must be mad. I know he drank a good deal last night, but I should not have thought it would have affected him so much.’ And to put the finishing touch to the scene, he spoke to Policeman X 22, who had been watching the quarrel of two apparently respectable young men with deep interest, and said, as he dropped half a crown into his hand, ‘Just put the poor fellow into a cab, policeman; D. T., you know.’ The unsuspecting constable winked, and proceeded to carry out his instructions, and Stassart had the satisfaction of seeing his body, inhabited by his unfortunate rival, gently pushed into a passing hansom, while the policeman smiled knowingly at the driver.

So far he had triumphed over all his difficulties, and, indeed, congratulated himself upon the successful termination of the scene just recorded. But he foresaw that further difficulties were to come, and felt rather uneasy at the prospect. Gladys had been quite frightened by the quarrel between the two young men, and begged her lover to take her home at once. Their walk back was a quiet one, and they spoke little till they arrived at the house. As they went in Miss Meredythe remarked to Stassart: ‘Go into the drawing-room, Stanton, you will find auntie there. I will come down as soon as I have taken off my things.’

Stassart did not know where the drawing-room was, but opened the first door he came to, which happened to be the dining-room. Gladys, who was going upstairs at the time, noticed it, and thought to herself, ‘Stanton really seems very absent-minded to-day; I wonder what has happened to disturb him? I never heard of that sunstroke before.’

Stassart, meanwhile, had found the proper room, and tried to walk in as if he were quite at home, though he felt that his endeavour to appear so was not a conspicuous success. He was nervous, and his nervousness increased when he saw in the room *two* ladies,

both middle-aged, talking eagerly together over a piece of fancy-work. Which was Gladys' aunt? He was unable to decide, for both of the ladies seemed so at home that he could not tell which was the hostess and which the guest. He resolved to make a dash at them, as it were, and to trust to chance that he should accost the right lady. But by the playful providence which generally directs our actions at such a crisis, he went up to the wrong lady, cordially shook hands with her, saying, 'Good morning, aunt. Gladys has brought me to lunch with you to-day, you see.'

'Indeed, sir,' said the lady addressed, who could not imagine who this young man was who called her aunt, and seemed so familiar. Mrs. Branxton, Gladys' real aunt, was simply aghast. What had come over Stanton that he should act in this strange way? Besides, he never was accustomed to call her by the familiar name of 'aunt,' but always Mrs. Branxton. She felt quite uneasy.

'Mr. Kingsford,' she said, 'you seem very absent-minded. Don't you see you have made a mistake? What are you thinking of? This is my cousin, Mrs. Merivale.'

Stassart felt miserable. But he did his best to get out of it. 'I'm very stupid this morning, auntie dear,' he said, 'but the fact is, I had a return of that confounded sunstroke yesterday, and my head is not quite right.' He hoped the 'auntie dear' would soothe Mrs. Branxton. But she only thought he had become still more familiar, and did not quite like it. But, with a polite smile, she accepted his explanation, and turning to Gladys, who at that moment was entering the room, said laughingly: 'Why, Mr. Kingsford is quite forgetting his friends. He actually took my cousin for me just now. He seems quite *distracted* to-day.'

'Yes,' said Gladys, with a faint smile. 'But he isn't quite himself; are you, Stanton? His sunstroke is troubling him again.'

'Can I get you anything for it?' asked Mrs. Branxton, anxiously.

'Oh! no, thanks; it will soon pass off,' said the false Kingsford. 'I must be more careful this hot weather, that's all.'

'Perhaps some iced claret would do you good?' suggested Mrs. Merivale, kindly. 'It's very cooling, you know.'

'Yes, you shall have some at lunch,' said Mrs. Branxton. 'And we might go to lunch now,' she added; 'I think Jones is sounding the gong.'

The three ladies and Stassart went into the dining-room, and luncheon was served. The conversation was pretty general for



some time, but soon became rather embarrassing. Mrs. Merivale was speaking of her son, who had recently gone up to Oxford.

'Ah!' said her cousin, Mrs. Branxton, 'what is your brother doing now, Mr. Kingsford? He was at Oxford, was he not?'

'Oh! yes,' answered Stassart, making a wild guess, 'he is up still and reading law.' This was unfortunate. Gladys looked at him in amazement.

'Why, Stanton,' she said, 'you told me he was at Cambridge reading medicine, and would soon take his degree.'

'Yes,' answered Stassart, 'he was at Cambridge, but got ploughed, so he went to Oxford.'

'How very singular!' remarked Mrs. Merivale. 'I should have thought he would have tried again at Cambridge.'

'Oh! he became very tired of the place, and the dons wouldn't have him in the college,' answered Stassart, 'so I advised him to go to the other University.'

'Oh! your own University, is it not?' asked Mrs. Branxton, in the most innocent way. 'Let me see. I forget which college you were at?'

'Brasenose,' replied Stassart confidently, for he thought Kingsford was a Brasenose man. He fancied he was safe this time. But Gladys corrected him again.

'Why, you were at Balliol, Stanton; I remember lunching in your rooms often in commem. week.'

'Balliol? Yes, I said so, did I not?' he asked, with assurance.

'No, you said Brasenose,' remarked Gladys.

'I meant Balliol though, of course,' he said; 'fine old college too.' He felt safe again, and talked about Oxford quite enthusiastically, till Mrs. Merivale asked another innocent question:

'What part of South Africa did you visit?' she said. 'I have some friends out there, and I am rather interested in the colony.'

'I was at Kimberley,' he replied, 'surveying the country round there for a mining company.'

'Which company?' inquired Mrs. Merivale eagerly; 'I have been asked to take some shares in one of those mines, and should like your private opinion.'

'It was the Kimberley Mining Company,' answered Stassart, at random. He would have been quite safe if Gladys had not known so much about it. She, unfortunately, was fully aware that it was another company, the 'New Griqualand and Basuto,' as it was called, in direct opposition to the one Stassart had named. But she said nothing this time.

‘Well, what do you think of it?’ asked the lady, in a business-like tone.

‘Oh! a very fair investment on the whole,’ he replied, ‘though of course I must not betray any secrets.’

‘Of course not,’ Mrs. Merivale said; ‘but you might tell me who are the directors. My husband may know some of them.’

Stassart was quite at a loss. ‘I really forget their names just now,’ he said, ‘but I will send you a prospectus, if you like.’

‘Thanks,’ said the lady, ‘I should be glad if you would;’ but to herself she remarked that he certainly was a most absent-minded young man. Not know the names of his directors, indeed! Certainly very forgetful of him. However, she said no more, and, luckily for the representative of Kingsford, the rest of the conversation during the meal did not touch upon subjects with which he was unfamiliar, and he congratulated himself that, after all, he was getting on pretty well.

When Gladys and he were left alone together after lunch, Stassart hoped that there would be a temporary cessation at least from his perplexities. But fate did not seem at all propitious to him to-day. Almost the first remark that Gladys made was:

‘Oh! Stanton, what time ought I to be ready?’

‘To be ready, darling?’ answered Stassart. ‘Ready what for?’

‘You don’t mean to say you have forgotten again?’ asked Gladys, with a tone of some vexation. ‘You promised to take me to call on your friend Mrs. Audrey. You know you said you would like us so much to know each other.’

Stassart was hopelessly in a fix. He did not know who Mrs. Audrey was, nor where she lived. He must make some excuse.

‘Don’t let us go to-day, Gladys,’ he answered; ‘it’s so hot and dusty. We’ll stay here instead, dear; or go for a walk again, if you like.’

‘Oh! but, Stanton, if I don’t go to-day,’ she said, ‘I don’t see how I can go at all, for I’m so busy now, you know. And besides,’ she added, in a plaintive tone, ‘I’ve kept this afternoon on purpose, and put off Eva, who wanted to come and see me very particularly.’

‘Well, I don’t want to go, Gladys,’ said her supposed lover. ‘Mrs. Audrey can wait. I don’t care so much about her as all that.’

Gladys was becoming not only surprised, but vexed. ‘I think, Stanton,’ she remarked, ‘you are very inconsiderate. You told me only two days ago how much you wanted us to meet each other, and said so much about her that I felt quite anxious to call, and kept this very afternoon free for that reason. And now

you refuse to take me, just because you are too lazy to go out.'

'It isn't that, Gladys,' said Stassart, whose own temper was by this time a little tried; 'only I don't care much about it to-day.'

'I don't think you care much about me either to-day,' answered his lady-love, with some asperity. 'You have forgotten everything, and seem so strange and——'

'Gladys dear, you know I care for you,' said Stassart, hoping to soothe her. 'You know I do, darling,' he repeated, coming closer to her and placing his arm round her. He pressed her closely to him and once again imprinted a burning kiss on her lips, while his eyes looked with fierce passion into hers. Gladys felt frightened. This was not at all like Stanton's ordinary manner or look. She tried to draw quietly out of his embrace, but Stassart would not let her go. His clasp grew tighter and his kisses more eager. Gladys felt now thoroughly angry.

'Let me go, Stanton!' she cried. 'I don't *want* to be kissed; and you are very unkind to-day, and I don't like it. And—and I wish I had asked Eva to come now, instead of putting her off like that;' and she pouted with vexation.

'Well, you can if you like,' said Stassart, sulkily; 'I'm not going to Mrs. Audrey's, anyway.'

'You are very horrid, Stanton,' answered the girl; 'and I think we had better go upstairs and talk to auntie, instead of quarrelling here.'

'If you like,' replied he, coldly, and followed her up to the drawing-room. As they went in, Mrs. Branxton, seeing Gladys' vexed look, asked with a smile, 'What have you two been quarelling about? That will never do——' But she was interrupted by the servant opening the door, and announcing 'A gentleman to see Mr. Kingsford, please.'

A cheery old gentleman of some sixty years of age, with a pleasant open face, walked in and went up to Stassart, shaking hands with him in a most hearty manner.

'Very glad to see you again, my boy,' said the old gentleman, who was in reality the uncle who had sent the cheque that morning. 'I called in to see you at your rooms, but they told me you had come here for lunch, and as I am only in town for a day, I thought I might venture to call too.'

'Certainly, sir; delighted to see you,' answered the bewildered Stassart, wondering who on earth it was. He stopped short, quite embarrassed, well aware that he ought to introduce him to the ladies, and not knowing in the least who he was. He felt the ladies

were looking at him. Gladys, who had turned away to a side table as she came into the room, looked round again, and stared in wonder at the awkward pause which followed. The situation was becoming too ridiculous. Stassart felt he must do something.

‘Allow me to introduce my uncle James, Mrs. Branxton,’ he began, nervously. The old gentleman started in amazement.

‘Your uncle James, sir!’ he almost shouted. ‘You mean to say you don’t know me from that idiot James, sir! What are you thinking of, Stanton?’

‘I am very sorry, uncle—sunstroke,’ he began, apologetically.

‘Sunstroke, sir!’ cried the old gentleman, who, though cheery, was choleric. ‘Sunstroke be hanged! You’ve never had sunstroke. You won’t know your own father next. Introduce me at once, sir, and don’t stand gaping there.’

Stassart felt it was a crisis. He looked at the three ladies, who had risen from their chairs and were staring in amazement at this extraordinary conduct on the part of the supposed Kingsford. Gladys, recognising the caller as Kingsford’s uncle Jonathan, was dumb with surprise at her lover’s apparent madness. Her would-be lover saw it was hopeless.

‘I am very sorry—I don’t know the gentleman,’ he began, desperately. Then, losing his temper at this unfortunate *rencontre*, he burst out, ‘And I wish I had never come here—and I’m not myself to-day. I am going out. I can’t——’ And without further explaining this extraordinary utterance, he rushed wildly out of the room. Seizing his hat, he pushed past the astonished servant at the door, and ran madly to Kingsford’s rooms in Edith Terrace. He had quarrelled with Gladys, made himself appear a perfect imbecile, and had broken down altogether, just because some old idiot of a relative had chosen that day to call and see the man whose shape he wore. The luck was all against him. After this he had no choice.

## VI.

He arrived at Kingsford’s lodgings, and hastened hurriedly to his room, uttering a deep curse at his ill-luck as he shut the door. As he did so, a man with haggard face and disordered clothing jumped up from a chair near the window. It was the real Kingsford, who had been waiting for his rival.

Stassart gave an involuntary start of horror and surprise as he saw his own form, with a desperate resolve written in his face and a blaze of deadly anger in his eyes, advance to meet him. His

own Self was rising against him, ready to strike him down in the midst of his mortification and failure. He involuntarily made a movement of self-defence as Kingsford strode savagely towards him.

'You villain!' exclaimed Stanton, breathless with rage, 'so you have come back at last. By heaven! you shall not return alive. Ha! I thought you would come. You have not succeeded in your trick—I can see that by your face. And it is as well you did not,' he went on, with terrible earnestness, 'or, by God! I would have shot you like a dog, even if you had been with *her*.' He pointed a revolver at his rival as he spoke. 'Look here, Stassart,' he continued, 'I know the trick you played me. It was clever, I admit—so clever that no one but ourselves can see through it. But I warn you of this, you don't go out of this room again alive unless you accede to my terms. I am desperate, and I would die willingly now if I could only kill you first.'

Stassart looked at his rival, and saw that he meant what he said, and that he was mad with rage. He thought it best to keep cool, and not provoke him further.

'Put down that revolver first,' he said, 'and then I will talk to you.'

'Talk to *me*!' shouted Kingsford. 'You will do as I tell you, Stassart, or else, as I am a living man, I'll shoot you on the spot.'

'I should not care much if you did,' answered the other gloomily, knowing his cause was lost. 'It's all up with me, anyhow. I will do as you like. Sit down, and I will explain to you.'

He poured out a glass of wine from a decanter that happened to be on the table, and, drinking it hastily, went on:

'I have played you a mean trick, Kingsford; I own it. I am a traitor; you need not tell me that. But I was mad when I did it—mad with love for your bride. You don't know, perhaps, about my love for her. I loved her when I met her at Oxford, more than a year ago. I told her then of my passion. It was useless, for she loved you too well. I left her, and for a whole year have done nothing but think of her and brood over my wasted hopes.' Even while he spoke he could not help thinking how curiously this confession was made. He was speaking to his own Self, who was sitting opposite to him, haggard, desperate, with a fierce light of righteous indignation in his eyes. It was like talking to a visible accusing conscience. The thought made him speak more unreservedly. He went on: 'Then I was tempted by that d—d little Japanese fellow, Kotaro, with his cold-blooded suggestion of a scientific experiment. I honestly think I did not realise the baseness of my action till I had begun. And then I was too much afraid of

what my two accomplices would think to draw back. Amida Sama told me of the possibilities of changed personality, and I allowed him to practise his arts upon you. Well, it was of no use. Gladys seemed to suspect me from the first. She would hardly let me come near her.'

A grim smile passed over Kingsford's face at this, and Stassart saw his conscience mocking him as it sat visibly opposite in that chair.

'People asked me questions I knew nothing about; and, to crown all, some old relative of yours came in, and I didn't know who he was. I was in such an infernal fix that I bolted. And I don't care how soon I'm out of it.'

It afforded Kingsford some satisfaction to know this, even in the midst of his misery. 'You had better get out of it as soon as you can, then,' he said, grimly.

'With pleasure,' said Stassart, almost eagerly; 'only we must go to Amida Sama in order to be restored again to our proper and respective identity. Let us go at once.'

'Yes,' answered Kingsford, putting away his revolver. 'You had better lose no time.'

The two young men went out together. The afternoon was far advanced, and dusk was coming on. Kingsford, still in Stassart's form, impatiently hailed the first cab he saw and told the driver to drive to the Japanese doctor's house. Fortunately he was at home, and took the two rivals to his inner room without delay.

'I know what you have come for, my friends,' he said, with his quiet gaze. 'The experiment is too successful, is it not?'

'It depends upon how you look at it,' answered Stassart, gloomily.

'Too d—d successful for me, sir,' said Kingsford. 'You have nearly ruined my happiness by your cursed experiment. And the only amends you can make is to undo it again as quickly as may be.'

'Yes,' said the doctor, 'I must acknowledge that your position was uncomfortable. I confess I had not paid sufficient attention to your probable feelings before beginning the change. I will make all the amends in my power.'

With his usual calmness of demeanour he looked at Kingsford, who gave himself up to his gaze unreservedly. The magic sleep fell upon him. Then Amida Sama beckoned to Stassart, who gloomily submitted to the same operation. The doctor looked at the two young men lying before him in a sleep as of death.

'A delicate experiment,' he said aloud; 'tis a pity it could

not be completed. But Western minds are very little advanced as yet;’ and he sighed pityingly. A dead silence fell upon the room.

Stanton Kingsford arose, and looked round him. He was in his own body once more. But the room was empty, and he saw no way out. He hesitated for a moment, then rang a silver bell that stood on a table near at hand. An Oriental servant appeared, apparently through the wall, and bowed him out by the narrow door thus disclosed. Kingsford would fain have questioned him, but the man pointed to his lips, and Kingsford remembered he was dumb. The young man went out into the night.

He never heard from Amida Sama or from Stassart, and did not care to trace them after one or two fruitless attempts. When next day he went to call on Gladys, she clasped him in her arms, and kissed him passionately.

‘My darling,’ she cried, ‘I have nearly lost you!’

Stassart had written a letter explaining all. The day before the wedding a Japanese mute brought Gladys an exquisitely wrought jewel-case containing a wealth of diamonds and pearls, utterly beyond the girl’s Western ideas of magnificence. They were truly Oriental in their splendour. But Gladys never wore them. And some people remarked that she was very superstitious about hypnotic influence; ‘which, after all, you know, is all rubbish,’ as they wisely added.

HENRY NORTH.

## The Paraschites.

EVERYTHING seemed burning! The sun burned overhead, the road burned underfoot, and the rocky sides of the narrow gorge gave back a scorching heat to the sun above and the road beneath. No breath of air stirred the gritty dust of the limestone rocks nor the hot sand which spoke of the desert beyond their barrier, but the atmosphere shimmered and quivered as if heated in a furnace.

The stony path wound between great boulders. No vestige of any green thing was visible, not even a dried-up mimosa bush or adventurous palm. I had entered the 'Valley of the Dead!' And the death in Nature seemed typical of the human dead lying around, beneath—one knew not where—in the terrible, blasted ravine that held so weird a buried treasure. A stillness as solemn as that of its population reigned in it; all seemed to harmonise grimly, awfully, with but one discord, and it increased the strange suggestiveness of the scene. The withering rays of the sun beat down on the vast sepulchre which burned and glowed beneath them, and its heat only intensified the realisation of the quiet, cold forms locked in that hot embrace.

Without the remorseless, shadeless glare;  
Within the everlasting shades.

As I slowly made my way up the winding ascent, the invisible seemed more real than the actual world around me, and under a midday Egyptian sun I felt a sudden impalpable cold for a moment envelope me. A sense of impending calamity overcame me with the strange cold, but it passed away as suddenly as it came, and I forgot it in the morbid fascination which possessed me.

I was no scientific observer 'learned in the wisdom of the Egyptians,' and yet for many days I had left Luxor, crossed the Nile, and the wide, green plain of Thebes, to enter this arid gorge which seemed to have cast its spell upon me. Daily, as I gazed on the ancient necropolis, I peopled the scene with the stately processions, the white-robed priests and wailing mourners, which were wont to cross the river, to pass along the smiling plain and leave it for the mountain tombs, contrasted regions as sharply



defined as their respective objects. And how short a life was spent in the fertile valley of the 'life-giving Nile,' while for many ages a people have lain in the barren valley of the dead, bearing still the semblance with which they walked and worked, laughed and mourned, in their brief earthly span!

Still the semblance! With the thought came again a strange chill sense of companionship. I *could* not feel that shadowy memories of what had been only surrounded me. I could not feel *alone*. The realism of the possible occupants of unknown tombs impressed me strangely; and as I looked at the stony hills, they seemed to open and reveal their hidden secrets.

In vain I tried to repel the sensation. In vain I attempted to call up as before a mental picture of the solemn pageants that had so often trodden the path I followed. The processions of priests and mourners had played their parts and had vanished; but I felt that in each the central figure remained and seemed before me. I knew that the faces that had looked their last on earthly scenes, and had gazed with unseeing eyes on the *Bab el Molook* in bygone ages, still kept the same faces turned in sightless watch on stately sarcophagus or humbler sepulchre, and I seemed to feel that gaze.

I told myself that the graves around had given up their mysterious dead, revealing at the same time the lives that had been lived in the far-off shadowy past; but still there seemed to me strange secrets buried on every side, of death and of life; above all, the secret of such preservation of what is destined to perish.

The thought gave another bent to my mind, and I shook off the sense of strange, invisible companionship as I mused on the sorrows and hardships of the paraschites—the Egyptian pariahs.

What a type their lot seemed of the cruelty that mingled so inseparably with the splendours of the old-world creeds! To be born to a revolting occupation, bringing with it an added burden of uncleanness, the discharge of every duty deepening that burden, and with it all a gloomy belief that the unsought obligation, their hereditary lot, was an expiation in sorrow and heaviness for sins committed in a previous existence—when, where? Childhood, maturity, and old age lived under a ban, and haunted by such a doctrine!

I pictured the child realising that he was not as other children, and shrinking from averted looks and whispers of 'A paraschites, unclean!' again, later in life, rebelling against the fate ordained, but forced by priestly commands and surrounding circumstances to undertake the loathsome task of preparing the bodies

of the dead for the more fortunate kolchytes, whose process of embalming them carried with it no such disgrace.

From childhood to old age contempt and shame, a hated duty, and a sense of perpetual contamination. What a life! And yet the caste lived on: shunned and avoided, they did not die out, but lived and suffered, 'married and were given in marriage,' and bore children to take up the yoke. Did love bloom all the sweeter among the despised people, making Eternal Justice triumph thus over the injustice of man? Or was Heaven's choicest gift marred by human malice then as it often is now?

I had journeyed up the *Bab el Molook* as I pondered on the bitter cup his fellows compelled the shuddering, shrinking paraschites to drink, and as I wondered whether any sweet was mingled with it, I found myself at the tomb of Sethi I. As I reached the spot the object of my visit banished the fancies that had been crowding thick and fast upon me, and I prepared to descend the rugged stone staircase.

I lighted a candle and placed a roll of magnesium wire in my pocket. The dim candle-light shone faintly, and a dark object flapped past my head. It was a bat; I had become very familiar with their stupid flight, yet the same vague apprehension seized me as a little time before. I paused, and half-unconsciously turned back, then, shaking off the feeling, resumed my course; and as passage succeeded staircase, and hall led to hall, my own individuality seemed to vanish and the present time, as the ancient world with its wisdom and its folly unrolled itself before my eyes.

Since the Valley of the Dead had so impressed me, I had lingered oftener over the portrayal of the ceremonies attending sepulture, and their beliefs beyond the grave, than in the tombs where the daily life of the ancient Egyptians finds place, and consequently had visited the seventeenth tomb several times. The series of mummies represented in tombs with the folding doors wide open in the Great Hall was the object of my present visit, and as I reached the spot I lighted the magnesium wire to examine them by a better light. The effect was startling. The figures seemed to wake up and step forward as the bright light fell on them, as if about to pass through the doors so long open. One after another the light fell on them with the same curious effect. When I had completed the observations I wished to make I returned to the first of the series, and, with a recollection of the thoughts that had occupied me as I reached the tomb, said aloud:

'Everywhere representations recalling the handiwork of the poor, despised paraschites!'

My voice sounded strange in the rock-hollowed chamber; I turned to seek the outer air, but a sound, which seemed like an echo, arrested my attention, and once again I turned and faced the sculptured mummies.

Again and yet again I heard the words repeated, 'Despised paraschites!' They seemed to rise and fall in a mournful cadence, and sounded as if from a great distance.

As I listened, all power of volition left me and I stood motionless, my whole being absorbed in a horrible expectation. My eyes remained fixed where they had rested, as I hurriedly turned at the sound of a fancied echo.

I was opposite the second of the mummy representations, and as I looked, the figure moved slowly to one side. Slowly, evenly, as if sliding in a groove, the block of sculptured stone moved from left to right. It might have been five minutes—it seemed to me hours—and the sliding ceased, disclosing a dark aperture large enough for a man to stand up in. The light was still in my hand, and a long winding passage came into view which was lost in the darkness beyond, as the light only irradiated a part. I looked down the darkening vista with horror, which increased as the sighing sound became momentarily louder, though still distant, until the chamber was filled with the reverberations of a moaning voice, which ever repeated my words, 'Despised paraschites!'

Minutes passed, and still the voice grew nearer. The hall was close and stifling, but from the mysterious doorway an icy coldness issued, which every moment became more intense. It seemed to chill the very blood in my veins, and grew colder in exact ratio with the increasing power of the approaching voice. *Something* was coming, and every instant drawing nearer.

With a supreme effort I closed my eyes, in the determination to shut out the approaching horror; but again all power left me, and they unclosed involuntarily and stared fixedly before me.

One moment I gazed only at the vacant aperture, the next it was filled with a human form; and at its appearance the wailing voice ceased, and a silence as intense as the terrible cold emanating from the sudden apparition fell on the Great Hall of the tomb of Sethi I.

The figure was that of a young man, finely formed, with handsome, clear-cut features, but the expression of his face was that of yearning misery. It seemed the personification of the wail, which ceased as he appeared—'Despised paraschites!'

I looked at the face before me, until its utter wretchedness

banished in part the horror which possessed me. The eyes seemed to say, 'Speak,' and, in a choked voice, I gasped:

'Who are you?'

Again the mournful sigh sounded in my ears—'Despised paraschites!'

'Impossible,' flashed through my mind, but I could not speak the words.

'What is impossible?' the sad voice asked, replying to my unspoken thought.

The mournful sound ceased for a moment, then resumed in a gradually firmer strain: 'Nothing. For ages I have waited for one voice to utter in a tone of sympathy the hated name of our people, and often in the cycles that have gone by I have said I waited for the impossible. But, lo! I have not waited in vain, and the hour of my release has come. What, then, is impossible?'

'Your release?' I asked; 'how has it come?'

'When I was condemned to haunt these scenes,' the paraschites answered, 'a hope was held out that in the distant future I should meet a man whose life would be given to end my torment. I have waited, and my weary feet have traversed the mountain tombs from Thebes to Syene. For ages no step but mine sounded in the silent tomb, no voice was heard. In darkness and alone my spirit failed me, and ceaseless regret and constant longing for a vanished face accompanied me ever. Then a change came. I heard again the sound of hammer and chisel, and once again voices sounded in my ears. It is not a long season since the silence of ages was first broken, but the few years in which men have come and gone, and no sound of compassion for the despised paraschites has been uttered, have been to me a longer torture than that which went before. But now'—the voice altered and became clearer and more joyful, till it gained a triumphant ring, and the sadness of the face gave place to an eager hope—'now I have heard the voice of pity, and I claim the life that is to release me. I shall go to the fields of Aalu, and there I shall find Katuti.'

The paraschites breathed the last word with a lingering, fond intonation. As I watched the change in face and voice the words uttered made but a slight impression on me, but in the silence that followed the full meaning of what I had heard came upon me, and the sentence, 'I claim the life that is to release me,' seemed to ring like a knell in my ears.

I looked again at the dark form before me. The wretched face had held me spell-bound, but as my eyes wandered over the

figure I saw that it was strong and supple. The arms were crossed over the breast, and I now observed with a sickening sensation that in one hand the paraschites held a bronze hook, in the other a flint knife. I, too, was young and strong, but I felt a terrible consciousness of lack of power to lift a finger in my own defence. I tried again to turn and go, but my limbs refused to obey me, and I knew I was delivered into the hands of the being before me.

An eager love of the life that was demanded of me filled my heart. The sunshine I had left seemed beautifully bright, not glaring as I had thought it, while the burning heat which concentrated itself in the desolate valley contrasted with the unearthly coldness now filling the tomb I had sought, seemingly to find for ever, until I longed for it with a painful intensity. Oh! for one gleam of sunlight, one breath of warm air to restore me to myself, and release me from this thralldom.

And as the voice of the paraschites had softened from its ring of triumph into a sweeter cadence at the name of 'Katuti,' so my spirit left the gloom and horror and passed to a quiet English home. I saw a close-shaven lawn and large cedar tree; under its shade rested a slight figure, and the bluest eyes that ever spoke truth and love looked into mine with glad welcome. But as I gave back an answering look, the voice near me sounded again, and my wandering spirit returned in grief to the paraschites.

'Are you ready?' he asked. 'Are you ready to release him who has waited for you so long?'

'What service do you require?' I returned, with a vague hope that I had mistaken his meaning.

'I evaded the duties of my life,' he answered, 'and I was condemned to haunt these scenes until I had once performed them. My sentence further limited me to one whom I should hear commiserate my unhappy caste. I have often despaired. In life I had heard the voice of sympathy for the despised paraschites from one alone, but it has come again. Fear not to give yourself into my hands; with my release will come your own, for the rewards of mercy and self-sacrifice will be yours.'

I tried to utter some words of dissent, to urge my disbelief in the sacrifice demanded, but they failed me, and in despair I cast my eyes in silence on the ground.

The icy coldness became more intense, and looking up, I saw the figure approaching and slowly unfolding his arms.

'Tell me your story first,' I cried, desperately; 'let me at least know for whom I am to die.'

‘That is well asked,’ replied the paraschites. ‘Listen, and you shall hear the history of him whose deliverer you are. When I walked on earth I was known as Piankhi. Ever and again, as I have through succeeding ages haunted the abode of the dead, I have repeated the name lest, when mayhap fate would permit me to enter the fields of Aalu, it might be called and I know it not. The name that I should then ceaselessly sound I needed not to repeat, for it is graven on my heart—Katuti.’

Again I noticed the marvellous sweetness of the paraschites’ voice, but Piankhi resumed, and I forgot for a time my terrible position as I listened.

‘My earliest recollection is of a hut made of sun-dried bricks. Without the sun shone, the distant cornfields waved in the soft breeze, and the river afar off flowed between banks where the lotus bloomed and the river-fowl built their nests in the tall papyrus reeds. The world around was bright as the sunny skies and beautiful as the moonbeams, but within the little hut all was gloom and sadness. No woman’s smile cheered it, no gentle voice broke its dreariness. I lived alone with my father, and my first cloud was caused by his gloomy and sullen face, and crouching attitude which seemed to cover into the shade. I basked all day in the sunshine, and the sand in which I played ran golden through my childish fingers, and I wondered that its glittering rain brought no laughter to my father as to me. Ten times Zefa had bestowed the blessing of the overflowing waters on the land, and still I wondered.

‘I had never wandered far afield from our hut, but one day I strayed and found myself among strange children at play. I eagerly joined them, and ran and shouted for joy as did those around me. One long summer day we played, and when evening came my joyous companions demanded the name of their new play-fellow.

“‘Piankhi,” I answered, “son of him who is called Ani the paraschites!”

‘The children stared in affright, then turned and fled, murmuring as they sped like stones from a sling, “A paraschites, unclean!”

‘One only remained, a gentle-eyed little maiden whose pitying glance sank deep into my heart.

“‘My name is Katuti,” she said, as if in answer to my words. “Farewell.”

‘The children’s meaning was unknown to me, but their action made it clear. From that day my father’s gloom caused me no

wonderment, and the golden sand no mirth. I could no longer play in it with an untroubled heart.

‘Day by day I sought the place where the children danced and sang, their faces reflecting the brightness of the summer sun, but I gazed at their sport from the shade, sheltered from their sight by a bush, behind which I crouched in the attitude familiar to me from my earliest recollection of my father. The position became natural to me, as part of my birthright of shame and uncleanness when I learned my heritage.

‘Once or twice I saw the dark eyes of Katuti rest on my hiding-place, and I felt that she knew it, but that my secret was safe with her. One day she lingered when her companions left, and approached me.

“Do not come near me,” I exclaimed. “*You* must not become unclean.”

“That can be purified,” she answered, “but the thought of your sad face will not leave me, and you are always alone. Would my company make you only a little happier?”

‘I urged her not to run the risk, but my face revealed my joy, and she remained. From that time we met often and spent long happy hours together; in her presence I forgot all sorrow, though when she left me an added weight of woe pressed me to the earth, a dread that I had contaminated Katuti.

‘So my childhood passed, and the time drew near when I must enter on my abhorred life’s work. I loathed the prospect, and as the days passed on I became determined I would not engage in it. No taint of uncleanness should touch me save that which rested on my birth—that I was powerless to affect, but he who loved Katuti must not defile himself.

‘I loved, nay, I worshipped, the dark-eyed child, now grown into lovely girlhood, but I dared not tell her so. I was a paraschites, unclean!

‘Often words of love rose to my lips, but ere they were uttered came that ever-present thought.

‘Often I drew nearer to her, but to remember that my touch brought contamination.

‘The day came when my father gave me these.’

Piankhi held out his knife and hook as he spoke, and a shuddering recollection of their use so overwhelmed me that for some moments I did not hear his voice. When I again understood his words they ran as follows:—

‘No commands, no threats affected me. I refused even to enter the hated precincts, and when evening came I returned to

my father's hut with him. I made no reply to his remonstrances, and after nightfall I went forth to the cool air, weary with the day's conflict. The moon was full, and I walked on in its bright light, careful that my hated shadow should not fall across any threshold, but underlying this care was rebellion at the cause of it.

'Why, I asked myself, was I born to shame? Or if the Gods so ordained it, why was I not granted an insensibility to accord with it? Why was I cursed with a man's heart, with feelings and longings never to be satisfied? Why should I not love as other men? Or, rather, why do I love as they?

'The last words I cried aloud in the anguish of my spirit, and as they passed my lips I saw Katuti.

'After my day of sorrow my feet had taken me unconsciously to the place where I had first seen her who ever consoled me, and again I found her there.

'The bright moonlight shone on the face of the maiden I loved, and it paled before my passionate glance. I drew nearer, and her soft eyes fell before mine. I forgot I was a paraschites, forgot all but that I loved Katuti, that she knew it, and did not shrink from me.

"Katuti," I began, but words failed me.

'I clasped her to my breast, and my trembling lips spoke my love silently. Once, twice I kissed her, and then—the recollection of who and what I was rushed upon me. I released Katuti and fled.

'On, on, through the summer night I ran, and the morrow's dawn found me far from the Theban plain, and beside the flowing Nile.

'I was a paraschites, unclean! And yet I had held Katuti in my arms and pressed my lips to hers. Should I again return to our hut, where everything spoke of degradation and shame? Or would it be better to end such a life as mine now that it had known one moment of such bliss? Better, far better—still Katuti loved me, I felt it as my heart beat against her own; again the joy might be mine, and yet again, as oft-repeated as I yearned for it. The maid who had not refused me her childish sympathy would not deny my passionate longing.

'But at what cost? Her contamination, the sharing of the shame of such a life as mine! Could I see Katuti's soft, compassionate eyes learning to droop with wondering pain at averted looks and shrinking gestures—disgrace as the reward of pity, degradation as the price of love?



‘It was too great a price. My choice was made.

‘Perchance the life-giving river might purify even the paraschites, and fit me, washed and cleansed from all uncleanness, to find again Katuti. I gazed once up at the sky crimson with the streaks of dawn, drew one long, last breath of life, and sprang into the gliding river.’

Piankhi paused, then added in a lower tone :

‘The secrets beyond my life I may not reveal. I have told you I was condemned for having refused to perform the duties to which I was born, and sentenced to haunt these dreary scenes until I had once fulfilled them. I have longed for that which I once abhorred, for still in the fields of Aalu Katuti awaits my coming. Now you know for whom you are to die.’

Piankhi stepped forward as he said the concluding words, and again I saw the executioner where a moment before I had pitied an agonised spirit.

‘My death cannot profit you, unhappy Piankhi,’ I cried ; ‘one sinful mortal cannot expiate another’s fault, even with his life.’

‘You speak from earthly experience, I from the shades beyond,’ was the solemn answer, and again the dark form of the paraschites drew nearer and his face grew set and stern.

‘Have mercy,’ I pleaded. ‘I too love ; let the memory of Katuti save me.’

The stern face softened, but the answer expressed no wavering.

‘I have waited for ages for her, can you not wait a little span ? And ever with your future joys will come the blessing of our reunited spirits.’

As he spoke Piankhi touched my breast with his knife. The light fell from my hand, and I sank back—back into unfathomable space.

A long interval elapsed, and slowly, fearfully I opened my eyes, but I opened them in impenetrable darkness. The air was close and stifling, and as I lay I seemed pressed down by a heavy weight. I put my hand to my throat, and found my clothing disarranged, my neck and chest bare. Where was I ?

The icy cold had gone, and the silence of the tomb was unbroken. Had the paraschites performed his duty ? Was I doomed to take his place, to remain in eternal gloom ?

With the thought came a realisation of its horror, and I burst the invisible bonds that had fettered me, and sprang to my feet. The darkness seemed to close around me, the heavy air to weigh

me down, but I stumbled on through spacious halls and tortuous passages until a glimmer of light spoke of release and freedom. I ran forward, and in a few moments stood once again in the outer air.

The sun still beat down on the withered, barren Valley of the Dead, but the shadows of the crags and boulders were long, telling of the time that had gone by since I last stood in the glare and the heat.

Piankhi the paraschites, what had he been?

A dream, a fancied vision, begotten of the thoughts and feelings which had beset me as I journeyed up the weird ravine?

Then so startling a dream, so realistic a vision, that it remained with me in the sunlight, and I rode down the stony path with a haunting sense of his despairing anguish at my flight. And never again can I revisit the *Bab el Molook*, which speaks to me with so thrilling a recollection of the love and sorrow of the paraschites, that whenever I recall its dread desolation I am constrained to utter a heartfelt *requiescat in pace*.

MALLARD HERBERTSON.

## A Mysterious House.

EXPLANATIONS are usually very tedious, and so without any introduction or preambulation I will plunge right into the midst of this uncanny story I am about to tell. . . . When, some fifteen years before the time of which I write, I was a schoolboy at Eton I made close friends with a fellow above me in the school, named Pellham. We were very great chums, and later on we went to Cambridge together, where my friend spent money and time in wasting both, while I read for holy orders, though I never actually entered the Church. Since that time I had completely lost sight of him and he of me, and, with the exception of seeing his marriage in the papers, had no news at all of his whereabouts. One morning, however, towards the close of September 1857, I received a letter from him, short, precise, and evidently written in a great hurry, asking me to go down and see him at his family seat just outside Norwich. I packed my bag and went that very same evening. He met me himself at the station and drove me home. We hardly recognised each other at first sight, so much had we changed in appearance, both being on the dark side of thirty-five, but our individual characters had remained much the same and we were still to all appearances the best of friends. My friend was not very talkatively disposed, and I kept up a fire of questions until we drew up at the park gates. Going up the drive to the house he brightened up considerably, and gave me plenty of information about himself and family. He was quite alone, I was surprised to hear, his wife and two daughters with an uncle of his having left for the Continent two days previous. After dinner he seemed quite the old 'Cambridge Undergrad' again, and once settled round the old-fashioned hearth, with cheroots and coffee, we talked on over the days spent at Eton and Cambridge. We were just discussing our third edition of tobacco, when Pellham suddenly changed the subject, and said he would tell me now why he had written so shortly to me to pay him this unexpected visit. His face grew grave as he began by asking me if I was still a sceptic as regards ghostly manifestations.

'Indeed I am,' was my answer; 'I have had no reason to change my views on the subject, and think exactly as I used to at Cambridge, when we so strongly differed; but I remember you then

saying that, if ever in after years you should come across an opportunity of proving to me your ideas on the subject, you would write to me at once, and I also recollect giving my word that, if possible, I would come. But during the fifteen years that have since passed by I have bestowed little, if any, thought on the subject.'

'Exactly,' answered Pellham, with a grave smile that did not please me; 'but now I have at last heard of a case which will satisfy us both, I think, so I wrote to you to come down and fulfil your old promise by investigating it.'

'Well! let me hear all about it first,' I said cautiously. I certainly was not overjoyed to hear this news, for, though a sceptic to all intents and purposes, still 'ghosts' was a subject for which I had a certain fear, and the highest ambition of my life was not to investigate haunted houses and the like just because I had years ago promised I would should a chance occur. But I repressed my feelings and tried to look interested, which I was, and delighted, which I certainly was not. Pellham then gave me a long account—thrilling enough too it was—of the case, which I have somewhat condensed in the following form. Some three or four years before, my friend had bought up a house which stood on the moorland about eight miles off. One morning before breakfast the tenant of the house, a Mr. Sherleigh (who was there with his family), suddenly burst into my friend's study without any ceremony, and, in great heat and excitement, shouted out the following words:

'You shall suffer for it, Lord Pellham, my wife mad, and the little boy killed with fright, because you didn't choose to warn us of the room next the drawing-room, but you shall——.' Here the footman entered, and at a sign from his master led the excited and evidently cracked old man from the room, but not before he had crashed down some gold pieces on the table, with: 'That's the last rent you'll get for that house, as sure as I am the last tenant.'

'Well,' continued my friend, 'that very day, now two years ago, I rode over there myself and the house was empty. The Sherleighs had left it, and since that day I have never been able to let it to anyone. Mr. Sherleigh, who was quite mad, poor fellow, threw himself before a train, and was cut to pieces, and Mrs. Sherleigh spread a report that it was haunted, and now no one will take it or even go near it, though it stands high and is in a very healthy position. Two nights ago,' he went on gravely, 'I was riding past the road which leads up to it, and through the

trees I could see light in one of the upper rooms, and figures, or rather shadows, of a woman's figure, with something in her arms, kept crossing to and fro before the window-blind. I determined to go in and see what on earth it was, and tying my horse just outside I went in. In a minute or two I was close underneath the window where the light was still visible, and the shadow still moving to and fro with a horrible regularity. As I stood there, undecided, a feeling within warned me not to enter the house, so vivid, it was almost a soft voice that whispered in my ear. I heard no noise inside, the night air was moaning gently through the fir trees which surrounded the house on one side and nearly obscured the upper part of the window from view. I stooped down and picked up a large stone—it was a sharp-edged flint—and without any hesitation hurled it with all my might at the window pane, some eight or ten feet from the ground. The stone went straight and struck the window on one of the wooden partitions, smashing the whole framework, glass and all, into a thousand splinters, many of which struck me where I stood. The result was awful and unexpected. The moment the stone touched the glass the lights quite disappeared, and in the blackness in which I was shrouded, the next minute, I could see hiding behind the broken corners of glass a dark face and form for a short instant, and then it went and all was pitch dark again. There I was among those gloomy pine trees hardly knowing which way to turn. The face I had caught a momentary glimpse of was the face of Mr. Sherleigh, whom I knew to be dead! My knees trembled. I tried to grope my way out of the wood, and stumbled from tree to tree, often striking my head against the low branches. In vain. With the weird light in the window as a guide, I had taken but a few minutes to come, but now all was dark and I could not find my way back again. I felt as if the dismal tree trunks were living things, which seemed to move. Suddenly I heard a noise on my left. I stopped and listened. Horror! I was still close to the window, and what I heard was a cracking and splintering of broken glass, as if some one from inside were slowly forcing their way out through the hole made by my stone! Was it he? The fir tree next me suddenly shook violently, as if agitated by a powerful gust of wind, and then in a gleam of weird light I saw a long dark body hanging half-way out of the window, with black hair streaming down the shoulders. It raised one arm and slammed down something at my feet which fell with a rattle, and then hissed out: "There's the last rent you'll ever have for this house." I stood literally stupefied with horror, then a cold numb

sensation came over me and I fell fainting on my face, but not until I had heard my horse give a prolonged neigh and then his footsteps dying away in the distance on the hard moorland road. . . . When I recovered consciousness it was broad daylight. I was cold and damp; all night I had lain where I fell. I rose and limped, stiff and tired, to the place where I had tied my horse the night before, but no horse was there. And the horrible sound of his hoofs echoing away in the distance came back to me, and I shuddered as I thought of what I had seen. After a terrible trudge of three hours I reached home. A tremendous search had been made for me, of course, but no one dreamt of looking for me where I really was. The horse had found his way home, and I have never found out what frightened him so.'

My friend's account was over. He lit his cigar, which had gone out during the narrative, and settling himself comfortably in his chair, said, 'Well, old boy, that's a case I don't feel at all inclined to investigate by myself, but I'll do it with your aid. You know, a genuine sceptic is a great addition in such things, so we'll get to the bottom of it somehow.'

My feelings at that moment were not difficult to describe. I disliked the whole affair, and wanted heartily to get out of it; and yet something urged me to go through with it and show my friend that the house was all right, that imagination did it all, that the horse may have taken fright at anything, and that very possibly there really was someone in the house all the time, and imagination had done the rest. Such were the somewhat mixed thoughts in my mind at the time. However, in a few moments all was settled and we had agreed to go the following night, search the house first, and then sit up all night in the room next the drawing-room. Then we both went to our separate bed-rooms to think the matter over and get a long sleep, as we neither expected to get any the following night.

Next morning at breakfast we both talked cheerfully about the coming night and how best to meet its requirements as regards food, etc. We agreed to take pistols for weapons, horses as a means of conveyance, and abundant food wherewith to fortify ourselves against a possible attack of ghosts.

The day drew on towards its close. It was very hot and sultry weather, and not a breath of wind stirred the murky atmosphere, as at 4.30 P.M. we bestrode our horses and made off in the direction of the 'White House.' A long gravel road, lonely in the extreme, led us across the wild uncultivated moorland for six or seven miles, then we saw a copse of fir trees which, my friend informed me,

were the trees which sheltered one side of the house. In a few minutes we had passed through the front garden gate and were among the dark fir trees, and then as we turned a sharp corner the house burst full upon us. It was square and ugly. Great staring windows in regular rows met our eyes and conveyed an unpleasant impression to the brain—at least, they did to mine. From the very moment we had passed the front gate till I left the house next morning, I felt a nasty sick sensation creep over me, a feeling of numbness and torpor which seemed to make the blood run thick and sluggish in my veins. The events of that night have remained engraven on my brain as with fire, and, though they happened years ago, I can see them now as vividly as then. Only an eye-witness can possibly describe them, should he wish to do justice to them, and so my feeble pen shall make the attempt.

It was about 6.30, and we had settled our horses in a barn outside for the night. There were only two walls to keep the barn in position, and these were simply a row of rotten posts, half-decayed in places, so we securely tied the horses and, with a good supply of hay, left them for the night. We then approached the door and, after fumbling in the lock for some time, Pellham succeeded in opening it. A sickly, musty odour pervaded the hall, and the first thing we did after a thorough search, which revealed nothing, was to open all the doors and windows all over the house, so as to let in what little air there was. Then we went upstairs into the little room next the drawing-room, where, according to Sherleigh, strange things had occurred. But the window was in pieces, and hardly an entire pane of glass was left, and we were forced to select another room on the same floor (i.e. the second) and looking out on the same copse of pine trees, whose branches almost touched the glass, so close were they. It was a very ordinary room; a fire-place, no furniture but a rickety table and three chairs, one of which was broken. The only disagreeable feature we noticed about the room was its gloominess; it was so very dark. The trees outside, as I have already said, were so close that the slightest breath of wind rustled their twigs against the window. We soon had six candles fixed and burning in different parts of the little room, and the blaze of light was still further increased by a roaring fire, on which a kettle was singing for tea, and eggs boiling in a saucepan, and at half-past seven we were in the middle of our first tea in a haunted house. It was, indeed, less luxurious than the dinners I had been used to lately, but otherwise there was nothing to find fault with, and a little later the tea things were cleared away in a heap in a corner (where,

by-the-by, they are to this day), and we were sitting round an empty table, smoking in silence. The door out into the passage was fast shut, but the window was wide open. The sun had sunk out of sight in a beautiful sky of wonderful colouring. Small fleecy clouds floating about caught the soft after-glow and looked unearthly as seen through the thick fir branches. The faint red hue of the western sky looked like the reflection of some huge and distant conflagration, growing dimmer and fainter as the dark engines of the night played upon it, extinguishing the leaping flames and suffusing the sky with a red reflected glow. Not a breath of air stirred the trees. My friend had left the window and was poking and arranging the fire, with his back turned towards me. I was standing close to the window, looking at the fast-fading colours, when it seemed to me that the window sash was moving. I looked closer. Yes! I was not mistaken. The lower half was gradually sinking; gradually and very quietly it went down. At first I thought the weight had slipped and gone wrong, and the window was slipping down of its own accord; but when I saw the bolt pulled across and fastened as by an invisible hand, I thought differently. My first impulse was to immediately undo the bolt again and open the window, but on trying to move—good heavens! I found I had lost all power of motion and could not move a muscle of my body. I was literally rooted to the ground. Neither could I move the muscles of my tongue or mouth; I could not speak or utter a sound. Pellham was still doing something to the fire, and I could hear him muttering to himself, though I could not distinguish any words. Suddenly, then, I felt the power of motion returning to me; my muscles were relaxing, and turning, though not without a considerable effort, I walked to the fire-place. Pellham, then, for the first time noticed that the window was shut, and he made a remark about the closeness of the night, asking me why I had closed it.

‘Hulloa,’ he went on, before I had time to answer, ‘by the gods above! what is happening to that window? Look—why it’s moving!’

I turned. *The window was slowly being opened again.*

Yes, sure enough it was. Slowly and steadily it moved or was pushed up.

We could but believe our eyes; in half a minute the window was wide open again. I turned and looked at Pellham and he looked at me, and in dead silence we stared at one another, neither knowing what to say or wishing to break the silence. But at length my friend spoke.



‘I wish I were a sceptic, old man, like you are; sceptics are always safer in a place like this.’

‘Yes,’ I said, as cheerfully as I could, ‘I feel safe enough, and what’s more, I am convinced that the window was opened by human agency from outside.’

Pellham smiled, he knew as well as I that no human fingers could have fastened the bolt from outside. ‘Well,’ he said briskly, ‘perhaps you are right; come, let’s examine the window.’

We rose and approached it, and my friend put his head and shoulders out into the air. It was very dark, and a strange oppressive stillness reigned outside, only broken by the gentle moaning sound of the night wind as it rustled through the trees and swept their branches like the strings of a lyre. I followed my friend’s example, and together we peered out into the night. Soon my eyes rested on the ground below us, and at the base of one of the nearer pines I thought I could distinguish a black form, clinging, as it seemed, to the tree. I pointed it out to Pellham, who failed to see anything, or at least said so; anyhow, I was glad to believe that my excited imagination was the real cause. We were still leaning out of the window in silence, when several of the trees, especially the one where I imagined I had seen the shape, were most violently agitated, as though by a mighty wind; but we felt not the slightest breath on our faces. At the same instant we heard a subdued shuffling sound in the room behind us, which seemed to come from the direction of the chimney. But neither of us referred to it as we slowly walked back to the fire and took up our places on either side on the two chairs, which were at the best very rickety.

‘It isn’t wise to leave the window open,’ said my friend, suddenly, ‘for if there really is anyone outside, they can see all and everything we do; while we, for our part, can see absolutely nothing of what goes on outside.’

I agreed, and walked up to the window, shutting it with a bang and firmly drawing the bolt.

‘I’ve brought a book,’ he went on, ‘which I thought we might read out aloud in turn to relieve the dulness and the silence.’

He stopped speaking and looked at me, and at the same moment I raised my eyes to his face. To my intense horror and surprise I noticed for the first time a long smear of blood, wet and crimson, across his forehead. My horror was so great that for some seconds I could not find my tongue, and sat stupidly staring at him. At last I gasped out:

‘My dear fellow, what has happened to you, have you cut yourself?’

‘Where? what do you mean?’ he replied, looking round him with surprise.

For answer I took out my handkerchief, and wiping his brow, showed him the red stains. But as I stood there showing him this proof and as he was expressing his utter astonishment, I distinctly saw something that for the moment made the blood rush from the extremities and crowd into my head. Something seemed to tighten round my heart. I saw a large, gleaming knife and hand disappear into the air in the direction of the window. It was too much; my nerves failed me, and I dropped fainting to the floor.

When I came to myself I was lying where I fell by the fireplace. Pellham was sitting beside me.

‘I thought you were dead,’ he said, ‘you’ve been unconscious for over an hour.’ He said this in such a queer manner and laughed so fiendishly that I wondered what had happened to him during the interval. Had he seen something awful and gone mad? There was a strange light in his dark eyes and a leer on his lip. Just then he took up his book quite naturally and began to read aloud, every now and then he made a comment on what he was reading, quite sensibly too, and soon I began to think, as I sipped my brandy out of our flask, that I must have had a frightful dream. But there at my feet lay the blood-stained handkerchief, and I could not get over that. I glanced at his face; the smear had disappeared, and no scratch or wound was visible.

Pellham had not been reading long, perhaps some five or ten minutes, when we heard a strange noise outside among the trees, just audible above the death-like stillness of the autumn night. It was a confused voice like the low whispering of several persons, and as I listened, still weak from the last shock, the blood stood still in my veins. Pellham went on reading as usual. This struck me as very curious, for he must have heard the noise plainly; but I said nothing, and glancing at him I saw the same light in his eyes and the evil leer on his mouth, looking ugly in the flickering glare of the candles and firelight.

Suddenly we heard a tremendous noise outside, altogether drowning the first. The horses had broken loose and were tearing wildly past the house. Long and wild neighs rang out and died away, and we knew our horses were gone. Pellham was still

reading, and as I looked at him a sudden and horrid thought flashed through my brain. It was this: Had he anything to do with this? Was it possible? Before I had time to answer my question Pellham threw down the book and made for the door, locked it, drew out the key, and opening the window threw it far away among the trees. I then recognised the awful fact that I was alone with a madman. I glanced at my watch, it was a quarter to one. Instead of one hour I must have been unconscious two at least. This was terrible in the extreme. He was a man of far more powerful physique than I. What was to be done? Pellham strode grinning up to the fire, went down on both knees and commenced blowing between the bars with all his might. I saw my chance, and quietly walking to the window, without a word I climbed out, and letting myself as far down as my arms would allow I then let go and dropped. It was a distance of four or five feet, but in the darkness I tumbled forward on my face. As I rose, uninjured, I distinctly heard the sound of running feet close to me, but in my bewilderment I could not make out clearly in which direction they were going; they only lasted a moment or two. But what a terrific sight met my gaze as I turned the corner of the house, and saw volumes of smoke pouring steadily out of the windows and roof of the back portion of the house. Now and again a long flame, too, shot up to heaven.

‘Good God!’ I cried, ‘the house is on fire.’

No wonder the horses had taken flight. But my poor friend, what could I do for him? The window was too high for me to climb in again, and the doors were locked. In a few minutes the flames would spread to this side of the house and the poor fellow would be burnt to death unless he had enough sense left to jump out of the window.

I hurried back to the spot where I had let myself down from the window, just in time to see the last scene of the most ghastly experience I have ever witnessed. Pellham was standing at the window. In his hand was a red-hot poker, and it was pointed at his throat, but the strain was too great for my nervous system and with a violent start *I woke up!*

After our heavy tea we had both fallen asleep, just as we were in our chairs. Pellham was still snoring opposite me, and the light was stealing in through the window. It was morning, about half-past six. All the candles had burnt themselves out, and it was a wonder they had not set fire to the dry wood near them.

Twenty minutes later we had re-lit the fire and were dis-

cussing the remnant of eggs and coffee. Half an hour later we were riding home in the bright, crisp, morning air, and an hour and a half later we were in the middle of a second and far superior breakfast, during which I did *not* tell my dream, but during which we *did* agree that it had been the dullest and most uncomfortable night we had ever spent away from home.

ALGERNON BLACKWOOD.

## My Dead Wife.

'My dear fellow, it is no use your trying to escape your fate. It is fixed. Mark my words, Inez Argent will be your wife before another six months have come and gone.'

I laughed when Harry Archer said this, and thought of two pretty blue eyes and a round, rosy, smiling face far away in a little country town.

'No, no,' I replied, with a decided shake of the head, 'Inez will marry a rich man. Besides, speaking candidly, she is not the sort of woman I admire.'

'She is not the sort of woman whose fascination you could resist, Bert. She admires you. That is enough. Her eyes will do the rest.'

'What on earth do you mean, Harry?' I asked perplexedly.

'Nothing,' and he smiled mysteriously. 'Wait until you know more of Inez than at present. I pride myself on my power of reading character in faces. You will not be able to resist loving Inez Argent, set yourself against her as you will.'

'But,' I remonstrated, 'my affections are already engaged.'

'Stuff and nonsense! At all events, if they are you will soon forget it. I tell you, Bert, it is Fate. I can read it in Inez Argent's eyes. You must and will marry her.'

I had seen very little of Inez when Harry spoke thus to me. When next I saw her I took more notice of her than I had done previously. She was staying with her cousins, the Argents of Newton, for a few weeks, and I also was on a visit to them. Jack Argent and I had been great college chums, and regularly once a year I went to Newton to do a little shooting in the well-stocked Newton preserves. There were other visitors in the house besides Inez and myself, Harry Archer being one of them. Why he should have spoken as he did about Inez—connecting her name with mine in that manner—I could not understand. I had never spoken of her to him, and I certainly had taken very little notice of her. If anything, I had rather slighted her, and singled out the youngest daughter of my host, Jack's sister, for especial attention.

After Harry's remarks, however, I resolved to know more of Inez. I prided myself on my power of resisting fascination in

women. My heart was (so I thought) so wholly and thoroughly given to a certain country lassie that no other woman in the world could have any attraction for me.

At first sight I had not considered Inez beautiful—rather the other way, in fact. She seemed to me ‘all eyes.’ But when I came to know her better, to watch her closely, to see her flushed and excited, and all life and animation, I altered my opinion.

I shall never forget that night on which the full force of her beauty took possession of me. She was half reclining on a couch of old gold brocade. Her dress was of crimson plush, cut low and revealing her exquisite neck and arms. Her hair, which was of a soft golden brown, was coiled high on her prettily poised head, and two diamond stars were placed just above the centre of her forehead. Her face was flushed with the daintiest of coral pink tints, and her eyes sparkled like twin stars. They were really violet eyes; but by night, veiled by their long jetty lashes, they seemed almost black. One fault only could I find, and that was that her mouth was a trifle large. Still that fault—if fault it could possibly be—was redeemed by the whiteness and regularity of her teeth.

I stood as it were spellbound before her. Could it be possible I had been in the same house as this divine creature for four whole days and failed to acknowledge her beauty? She must have read my admiration in my face; for raising her eyes she smiled.

‘Well, Mr. Meredith,’ she said in a curiously low yet dreamy voice, ‘you don’t mean to say you are actually coming to talk to me. I don’t think you have addressed more than a dozen words, and those of the most ordinary kind, to me since you have been here.’

The corner of the room in which we then were was deserted by the rest of the company. Jack Argent had brought out a whole heap of photographs—views of foreign countries, portraits of notabilities, &c.—and was entertaining a bevy of ladies and gentlemen at a table by the window with graphic descriptions of places he had visited and people he had met during a long tour from which he had only recently returned.

I dropped down on the sofa beside Inez Argent.

‘I think I must have been in a dream ever since I have been here,’ I answered softly. ‘I am wide awake enough now, though, and I humbly apologise if I have treated you with what might have seemed studied neglect.’

‘Oh no!’ and she smiled and began languidly fanning herself. ‘I did not think you neglectful. I know, of course, there are so

many other ladies in the house ; I could not expect any attention to be paid to a poor cousin like me. But, Mr. Meredith,' and she touched my arm gently, 'you cannot tell how grateful I am that you have come to talk to me now. I am very unhappy.'

'Unhappy! You!' and I drew a little nearer to her. 'Is it possible?'

'It is. My life has never been very happy. And now,' here her voice became tremulous, 'I am in great distress. I should like to ask your advice. I cannot appeal to my uncle yet. Will you help me?'

The man who could have resisted the pathetic appeal in those glorious eyes, and in those gentle, tremulous tones, would truly have had a heart of adamant.

'I will help you if I can, certainly,' I replied. 'I shall only be too pleased to do anything in my power for one who is so beautiful.'

She brightened up wonderfully at that compliment, and certainly looked anything but unhappy as, acting on her suggestion, we went out on to the terrace together. This terrace ran along the whole side of the house, and the drawing-room windows opened on to it.

Ah! how swiftly I forgot all about Elsie Maybrick, my little country lassie! This magnificent woman by my side was a woman whom a man might be proud to love, and to be loved by. Elsie's blue eyes were nowhere compared to those deep violet ones, that filled me with such a strange tremor when they were fixed on mine.

'Why is it you are unhappy?' I asked, as we stood there by the balustrade looking out on the moonlit scene below.

It was a glorious night. The air was warm, the wind hushed, and far away in the distance we could hear a nightingale singing, while overhead the stars were shining brilliantly, and the full moon sailed majestically along amid a few silver-crested cloudlets.

'Because I have to-day heard that I must soon—within a week, in fact—leave this house and go home.'

I had heard Inez was a 'poor cousin'; but it now struck me that, in addition to being poor, she had an unhappy home. There was no mistaking the accent of regret she placed on that word 'home.'

'Do not go so soon,' I implored. 'Only another week! It surely cannot be that you are obliged to go.'

'Yes, I am obliged to go. I know I cannot live here always. The sooner I go the better. Mr. Meredith,' she continued, laying her hand on my arm and raising those lovely eyes again to mine,

'you will think it strange I should make a confidant of you, but I feel I can trust you. I have been brought up chiefly by my godmother. She is an eccentric, but very clever, old lady, and until just before I came here we got on very well together. Then she offended me about something, and in a pet I told her that rather than live with her again I would go out into the world and earn my own living. This morning I had a letter from her. She has taken me at my word. She bids me now go out into the world and earn my living, or else go back to my own home. She will not support me any longer, she declares. What am I to do? How can I earn my living? I have not had an over-and-above good education. Only on one subject do I consider myself an adept. I am not fit to become a governess. There seems no alternative but to go home, and oh,' she cried, the tears rising in her eyes, 'I would rather do anything than that!'

'Do you not think you could be happy at home, then?' I asked, scarcely knowing what to say.

'Happy! Oh, you do not know. How should you? My mother is a woman of the world. Her whole soul is bound up in a round of festivities and amusements of every description. She and I have nothing in common. Apart from that, however, is the fact of her having recently married a man whom I hate. I loved my father dearly,' she added with much emotion. 'Do you think I could go back home and see a man I hate in his place? I will not go. But yet, what am I to do?' she asked despairingly; 'my godmother refuses to have me back, and I am not fit to become a governess.'

'Why can you not stay here? Your uncle is very kind, and I feel sure he would not mind having you,' I replied.

She shook her head.

'I would not stay even if he would have me,' she answered steadily. 'No! I must go home, I suppose, until at all events I can get something to do. I know I shall not be able to stay at home long. I am a veritable Cinderella. My sisters would be afraid I should steal their Prince. It makes me very unhappy.'

'Your godmother might perhaps be induced to be reconciled,' I suggested.

'I would not ask her to be,' she replied quickly; 'besides, I know her well enough to know she will never alter her mind when once it is made up.'

We stayed out there on the terrace talking for some time, and before we went in I had extracted a promise from her that she would not leave Newton for at least another three weeks. I had



come for a month, and I begged her to stay as long as I was there. With a little demur she promised she would, and promised also she would not tell her uncle of her godmother's refusal to have her back again, until just before she left.

Long before those three weeks had passed I knew my fate was fixed. I was in love with Inez Argent. I wrote to Elsie a most fatherly letter, telling her I did not think it wise we should continue writing to each other, but I hoped we should always be friends. She never answered it. I felt rather like a scoundrel. I knew she loved me, and though I had made no mention of marriage, I had given her to understand that I cared for her, very plainly. And so undoubtedly I had cared for her until Inez crossed my path, and with her beauty and fascination drove all thoughts of every other woman I had known completely out of my head.

I could not endure the thought of Inez being unhappy, or having to go out into the world and earn her living. I was madly, passionately in love, and on that last evening at Newton I asked her if she would become my wife.

She did not speak; she merely raised her eyes, and gently slipped her hand into mine. I forget all I said now. I only know I thought I was the most enviable man in the whole world to have gained so beautiful a woman to be my wife.

I think rather differently about the matter now, but *then* I did not know *all*.

Harry Archer smiled when I told him. He said he had seen plainly enough what was coming, and hoped with all his heart I should be happy. He rather spoke as though he doubted whether I should be.

'You are quite sure, aren't you, Bert, that you are really in love with her?' he said earnestly.

'Certainly,' I replied with a laugh. 'Why, Harry, I'm the happiest fellow in Christendom, and the luckiest. It isn't as though I was rich, you know,' I added. 'I'm not such a great catch myself.'

'H'm,' and he stroked his moustache reflectively. 'Don't know so much about that. If you come in for the Linsfame property you'll have a tidy little income and a mansion in the bargain of which any woman might be proud to be queen.'

'If I come in for it! I tell you, Harry, I do not want to come in for it. I hope little Freddy Burt will live to enjoy the wealth his father accumulated for him.'

'I'm sure I hope he will.'

With that Harry walked away. Something in his manner

mystified me. I felt sure he distrusted Inez. Why, I could not conceive. Surely it was not such a very strange circumstance that she should have fallen in love with me. I had told her plainly my circumstances. I had six hundred a year, and my income was derived chiefly from property left me by an uncle. But there was also just a chance of my one day becoming a rich man. If little Freddy Burt died before attaining the age of twenty-one the Linsfarne estate and the fortune accumulated for Freddy became mine.

Freddy was nine years old, and apparently strong, but he came of a delicate family. I sincerely hoped he would live, but when I told Inez about him she said but little.

'I am only interested in you, dear,' she said at length. 'Talk to me about yourself.'

We did not think it necessary to have a long courtship. Inez's friends had no objection to a speedy marriage. They seemed, to my surprise, rather glad to get rid of her. Thus it was that within six months we became man and wife.

After the honeymoon I took my wife to see my mother and sister, who had but just returned from a long stay in the Riviera for the benefit of my mother's health. We always called my sister Ethel 'Baby,' because she was the youngest, and the especial pet of the family. To my great surprise Inez, who had found great favour in everyone else's eyes, was not favourably regarded by Baby.

'I don't like her, Bert,' she asserted stoutly. 'I think she's got the horriddest, wickedest eyes I ever saw. I can't think what you married her for. She isn't half as pretty as Elsie Maybrick.'

'She is a thousand times lovelier,' I retorted hotly. 'Baby, how dare you speak against my wife!'

'I dare do anything,' was the audacious reply of this young minx of fourteen. 'I dare tell you, Bert, that you're an old stupid to have married her, and I'm not going to make a fuss of her if everybody else does.'

'Baby, you'll repent this!' I exclaimed angrily.

'No, I shan't, but you will. Oh, she isn't the woman you think her. She's downright wicked, only it hasn't all come out yet.'

Baby had mortally offended me—so mortally that when Inez and I had settled down comfortably in our pretty home within sight and sound of the sea, I would not, as I had promised, invite her to come and stay with us.

Inez and I were inseparable.

When Harry Archer came down to our sanctum for a few days, I fully expected he would chaff me considerably on my devotion to my wife. But to my astonishment he said nothing. Only it seemed to me he was grave and quiet to what he was formerly.

'You ought to marry, Harry,' I said one day when for a wonder we two were in the garden for a few minutes without Inez.

He turned and looked at me critically.

'Bert,' he said, 'tell me the truth—are you happy?'

'Happy?' and I looked at him in wonder. 'Why, having seen us together, can you doubt my happiness? I could not live without Inez.'

'I don't think you could,' he replied slowly. 'But, I'll tell you this, Bert; I never saw a fellow so changed in all my life as you are.'

'Changed, Harry?' I ejaculated. 'In what way?'

'Ah!' and he sighed; 'in a great many ways. You are a dreamy, doting, soft-headed idiot at the present time, asking your pardon for thus speaking plainly. You were never very strong of will. You had never much antagonistic power in you, but you had a little. Now you have none at all. You are your wife's slave. You are under her influence. I tell you that if she bade you kill *me*,' he added firmly, 'she has it in her to *compel* you to do it.'

'Good heavens, Harry! What are you saying?' I drew myself up and sternly confronted him.

'The truth, Bert, and nothing but the truth. Look here, my friend,' he added, speaking in a low but impressive voice; 'Inez once tried her powers on me, and failed completely. Take care; she did not marry you for nothing. She had an object in view. She is taking the preliminary steps towards accomplishing that object now. Bert, I warn you. Resist her, resist her!'

With that he turned away, and, not wishing to quarrel with him, though I deeply resented all he had said, I went indoors.

Inez was sitting by the window in a lounge chair. I drew another similar chair to her side and sat down. How beautiful she was! How could Harry say such cruel things of her? Besides, what did he mean by his mysterious allusions to her power over me? Was I too obedient to her slightest wish? Did I never exercise my own will? Did I never act independently? Was I always influenced by her opinion? I began to think this was so. Yet, why should it not be? She was a clever woman. I had never pretended to be a very brilliant man. I was her

inferior intellectually ; I felt it, and I owned it. Surely, then, it was right I should do as she commanded. Somehow or other it seemed to me I could not do otherwise. I loved her devotedly ; it was a pleasure to obey her slightest wish.

One day, after Harry had gone, I was lying on the couch in our pretty little drawing-room. I had not been at all well for some time. I was weak and languid. I refused to have a doctor. I declared it could only be the hot weather which was so affecting me.

Inez came in, and kneeling down by the side of the couch she put her hand in mine. She began to talk. Her voice was soft and dreamy. When she spoke in these peculiar, monotonous, yet very soothing tones, she always looked straight at me with those magnificent eyes of hers. And the result was always the same. I grew dazed and bewildered. I seemed to have no power left in me. I could not take my eyes from hers. I was, as it were, forced to look at her.

Three days later she came to me with a letter. I opened it, wondering why Mr. Hardy, Freddy Burt's guardian, should have written to me. To my surprise Mr. Hardy stated that '*in accordance with my invitation*, he would be very pleased to bring little Freddy to see me and stay a few days.'

'What on earth does he mean?' I asked, blankly looking at Inez. 'In accordance with my invitation ! Why, I most assuredly never invited him to bring Freddy here.'

Inez laughed.

'You did, Bert,' she said firmly. 'Why, you wrote two letters, because the first wasn't a very good one, and I believe I could show you the one you didn't send in your desk.'

'Impossible !' I ejaculated. 'I tell you, Inez, I never wrote to Mr. Hardy. I wouldn't have little Freddy here for worlds. Why, supposing anything was to happen to him while he was here, what would people say ? You must know, my dear, as I've often told you, little Freddy stands between me and a fortune. I don't want the fortune ; I have enough for us both to live comfortably on as it is. I hope little Freddy will live to enjoy his property.'

Inez looked at me with surprise. I was, to tell the truth, surprised at myself. I firmly believe I had never spoken so authoritatively since our marriage, but now I reiterated my resolve that Freddy should not come.

Inez went straight to my desk, and handed me a letter. I was staggered. Was my memory failing me utterly or what ? There was a letter in my own handwriting begging Mr. Hardy to bring dear little Freddy to see us and stay a few days.]

‘Inez,’ I gasped bewilderedly, ‘I couldn’t positively have written it. I haven’t the slightest remembrance of it.’

‘My dear Bert, you certainly did write it. Why, whatever is the matter with you that you cannot remember having written that letter? Don’t you remember you were not very well, and had been lying down, when I came and cheered you up a little by talking to you. Then you said you would like to see Freddy—this little fellow of six who stood between you and Linsarne Hall? So you wrote this first; then you wrote another letter, and I posted it.’

I shook my head, and passed my hand over my brow perplexedly. I could not remember having written that letter. Yet undoubtedly I had written it. What could be the matter with me? Was this lassitude and lethargic state in which I had found myself lately to result in some brain disease or what? It was a very serious matter. Evidently I had invited Mr. Hardy to bring little Freddy to stay with me, yet I could not for the life of me recall the fact of having written to him. My head was in a confused, muddled state. I could not think clearly about anything. How was it all going to end? If I lost my reason—and losing my memory appeared to me to be the first sign of that—what would become of Inez? It would be her death. My beautiful wife! I did not believe she could exist without me, any more than I felt I could without her.

We talked it over, or, at all events, Inez told me what I must do. I must not let Mr. Hardy know I had forgotten the invitation and did not wish him to bring Freddy. Freddy must come, and we would take great care of him.

Freddy came. Mr. Hardy brought him and stayed three days; then, at the urgent request of Inez, he left Freddy behind him to stay yet another three or four days, when we would see him safely home to his guardian’s again. It was only an hour’s ride in the train, but had it been only five minutes I would not have let him go alone, so anxious was I he should come to no harm if I could help it.

I was very nervous at his being left behind. But Inez’s wish was law. She would have him stay, and he stayed.

He was a pretty little fellow with a small round face and grey eyes. He had a lovely skin, clear, creamy, transparent, and a well-shaped head. I hoped great things of Freddy in the future. I believed he would develop into a clever man. His father had been a good friend to me. He had, in fact, educated me. He had also taken me abroad with him for a long time. Then, to

the surprise of everyone, he married late in life a young and delicate woman, who died in giving birth to Freddy.

When Freddy was four years old his father died. If he lived to be one-and-twenty he would inherit the whole of the Linsfarne property ; if he died before attaining that age, I inherited everything.

I said only the truth when I said I hoped he would live. Linsfarne was a magnificent estate, but I had no inordinate desire to possess it. I was never very ambitious. Great wealth, it seemed to me, often brought great worry and bother, and I hated worry. I always preferred taking things easily, and living on in a quiet, unostentatious manner. Not so Inez. Grandeur and state were to her, I had found to my surprise, a very great deal. She revelled in fine clothes, gorgeous dresses, and lovely things of every description. She was ambitious, very. I was not.

I think Mr. Hardy's coming did me good. I felt decidedly brighter and better. After he had gone, however, Inez was so constantly bringing to light most outlandish things which she declared I had done, and which in many instances she absolutely *proved* to me I had done, that I grew moodish and low-spirited. My memory was going fast. I could not remember having done these strange things. It was really very serious.

On the afternoon preceding that on which we had arranged to take Freddy home, Inez would insist on taking the boy down to the seashore. It was a sultry day, and ominous clouds were gathering overhead. I felt sure we were going to have a thunderstorm. Inez laughed. At all events she should go with Freddy, and I must and should come too. Very reluctantly I yielded to her command, and we started out.

We walked down to the shore. Inez sat down on the beach beside me, and Freddy played about on the sand. The tide was low, and there was a good wide stretch of sand just in front of us, and a little to the left some rocks. I closed my eyes and fell into a dreamy doze, when I was awakened by a startled cry from Inez. I roused myself and jumped up.

Freddy had climbed up the cliff as far as some caves, which, report said, had once been used by smugglers. Evidently he could not get down again by himself, or he was afraid to attempt it, for he stood at the entrance to one of the largest caves and screamed :

'Auntie' (he always called Inez thus), 'do come up. It's lovely. I can't come down again by myself. You'll have to come and help me.'

His voice sounded very thin and shrill, and he looked a very

tiny little fellow up there alone among the rocks. I was a good climber, and a little further along there was a pathway up the cliff by which Inez could get up easily.

I therefore climbed up to Freddy from where we were just below him, and Inez took the path.

He seemed very much to relish the idea of having made us come after him, and together we explored the caves. They were small and narrow, and very close. I suggested we should get out of them, and home as quickly as possible.

The sky was now inky black. I looked at Inez. She was very pale, and appeared agitated. Freddy begged to be allowed to remain in the cave until the storm—which was evidently close at hand—was over. He *loved* the thunder, he declared. He was not afraid.

The rain began to fall. We all three stood just within the largest cave and watched it as it fell, literally speaking, in sheets. Had we been down on the shore, we should have been drenched in no time.

Inez and I sat down on the rocky floor, and Freddy stood still at the entrance of the cave. Inez placed her arm round my neck, and laid her cheek to mine, holding my left hand tightly in her own. Then she drew herself back a little and fixed her eyes on mine.

‘Inez! Don’t!’ I entreated, for that strange feeling of utter subservience to her will was stealing over me.

She did not move. Still she looked into my eyes with that fixed burning glance that seemed to look into my very soul. I had no power to take my eyes from hers. The fascination was intense.

Presently, as she knelt before me holding both my hands in hers, she bade me, in a low, dreamy voice, look at Freddy. I followed the direction of her eyes.

The boy was sitting on the edge of the thin ledge of rock outside the caves, dangling his feet over the precipice—for from that spot the rock was almost perpendicular right down to the beach below.

I tried to call out to warn him, but no words would come.

Inez was once more before me. I could say or do nothing. I could only gaze into her eyes with that awful sense of fascination which took all will-power from me.

Presently I felt—as she looked at me—a horrible desire enter into my mind to steal softly behind Freddy. One slight push from behind would send him over the cliff. He, and he

alone, stood between Linsfarne and me. How quickly it could be accomplished! No one would know but what he had fallen over. Who could prove it were otherwise? Who could prove I had touched him *intending* he should start, fall forward, and be killed?

It was a very lonely part of the shore. No one had been about when he ascended to the caves, to our knowledge. It was such a very likely thing for a venturesome boy like him to do—to climb up to the caves and then turn giddy and fall backward!

We could go home in great (apparent) distress, and say we had lost him. He had run away from us. Then we could make a great fuss about his disappearance—get people to help us search—and by-and-by they would come across his dead body at the foot of the cliff. Linsfarne would be mine, and, whatever might be said, no one could *prove*—even if they saw me touch him (which from the beach they could not, unless we were watched through a powerful glass), no one could *prove* I meant him to fall.

I saw him sitting there. He was humming some popular air and kicking his legs against the rock. His back was towards us.

Inez bade me rise, and, like one in a dream, I obeyed her. She then, still holding my hands, walked backward with me to the mouth of the cave. She stopped there a moment and kissed me.

‘You must and shall do it,’ she whispered emphatically, ‘Linsfarne shall be ours. I will have it so. Yours shall be the hand that takes the obstacle from our path. You shall do it.’

The rain had ceased, but an ominous darkness was coming swiftly over the sea and shore. The heavens were still black as night, and great masses of heavy clouds lay piled together in the west.

‘You shall and will do it,’ murmured Inez again, and she released my hands.

I took a step forward. She was by my side. It was as though some evil spirit had entered into me and was compelling me to obey.

I stretched out my hand. Freddy was still humming, and kicking his legs vigorously against the rock. I laid my hand heavily on his shoulder. He started and looked round.

‘Over!’ cried Inez excitedly, ‘Quick! I command it,’

I gave a push—when——



Oh God! what was it? A dazzling, blinding lightning flash that seemed to wrap us all three in a glare of fire. I fell backward with a loud cry and a crashing deafening peal of thunder reverberated among the rocks.

When I opened my eyes my first thought was for Freddy.

He was standing unharmed by my side, his face ashen, and tears flowing down his cheeks.

'Thank Heaven!' I muttered fervently, 'you are not hurt, Freddy?'

'No, uncle,' he sobbed; 'only you did frighten me so when you gave me that nasty push. I almost fell, only I'd got hold of those two little bits of rock tight with my hands, and they saved me. Then, when that flash came, I scrambled up here again. Look!' he added, pointing to the right of me, 'Poor auntie's tumbled down.'

I looked and gave a cry of horror.

Inez had been struck by the lightning. She was dead. I realised the truth in a moment. She was wearing a bright steel waistband. It had acted as a conductor. She had been killed instantaneously.

I threw myself down by her side and wept long and bitterly, unheeding the rain which now came down in torrents, and remembering nothing but that my beautiful wife would never look at or speak to me again. I had idolised her—worshipped her. And now she was dead—dead! I waited until the violence of the storm had passed. I carried her dead body into the cave; and then, taking Freddy's hand, we began the descent to the shore and made for home, seeking help.

It was two months later. My mother and 'Baby' were still with me and doing their utmost to rouse me from the state of apathy into which I had fallen since the death of my wife. I was sitting in the curtained recess of a side bay-window in the drawing-room one afternoon when Baby entered, followed by my mother. I could see them, and, of course, hear all they said. Baby was holding a manuscript-book in her hand. Opening this, she proceeded to read from it.

'You know, mother,' she said by way of preliminary, 'I always said she was wicked, and would lead him on to bad things, and now I'm going to prove it to you. Here is her diary, and I'll read you a part of it.'

Whose diary? I wondered. However, I might as well sit where I was and listen.

'Now listen, mother,' continued Baby. She then very clearly and distinctly read as follows:

'I am accomplishing my object almost beyond my most ardent hopes. I did not think I possessed such complete power over him. I can and do rule him completely. I compel him to obey me. When he is under my magnetic influence he is like a child in my hands. I have not studied and studied, and practised my powers on him all for no purpose. I know I possess magnetic force of a very powerful nature. It is born in me, and he is a wonderfully good subject to work upon. Under my influence he can and does do things he would never dream of doing by himself. When my god-mother first found out my powers, and herself gave me the first instructions in using them, she little thought to what ultimate purpose I should put them. I have set my heart on being mistress of Linsfarne. Those estates shall be ours within another month. That child—that obstacle—shall come here. He shall never go home alive. I will compel my husband to be the means of causing his death. I must think out some plan. It will require a deal of plotting, perhaps—but it shall be done. I have found out I can make my thoughts become *his* thoughts. If I *will* with all my power he shall do a thing, he does it. He cannot help himself. He is a tool in my hands. He shall himself clear for me the way to Linsfarne. Love! Pshaw! Would I have married him had there been no Linsfarne in the distance? No! A thousand times no! I knew directly I saw him I could rule him completely. My eyes shall make my fortune—my eyes and my indomitable will combined. I will be mistress of Linsfarne, even if I commit murder myself for it. But there will be no need for that. Bert shall clear little Freddy from my path.'

I had been listening intently for some moments before the truth dawned upon me.

This was the diary of my wife.

Inez had written what 'Baby' was reading. I listened, and the perspiration came out in great beads on my brow. What did it all mean? Ah, how plainly I could see now how she had influenced me, how that that day in the cave it had seemed to me it was she who was rousing those horrible thoughts in my mind with regard to Freddy as he sat there on the edge of the rock in front of us. I was compelled by her superior power of will and her magnetic force to obey her when she willed I should touch that boy.

I waited to hear no more, but came out from behind the curtain and took possession of the diary. Baby had found it among some other books in a box, and triumphantly asserted she had read it all through. I afterwards searched the box, and found among its contents several abstruse works on magnetism. My wife had evidently studied to make use to the full of the mysterious powers with which Nature had endowed her.

When, some few months later, chance led me into the neighbourhood where her god-mother resided, I called on the old lady, and, in the course of the conversation, stated my belief that my wife had magnetic powers of great force.

'You are quite right,' was her reply, 'Inez was very strange. To tell the truth I was afraid of her, and that was really why I refused to have her back to live with me. I admit that at one time we studied magnetism together, but I found it soon wisest to give it up. The little unpleasantness which rose between us was due solely to her insisting on practising her arts on a servant I then had in the house. She would send this girl to sleep in the midst of her work, and cause her to do such outrageous things that I began to think she might someday try her powers on me. I did not relish the idea of that at all. Her father was a peculiar man, much given to studying occult sciences. Inez, undoubtedly, had inherited her power and her strange tastes from him. If he had lived I doubt not but that she would, one of these days, have become a remarkable woman. As it is, however, now, poor thing, she is dead and gone, we won't say any evil of her. She met with a most horrible death.'

'It was truly horrible,' I assented. 'It is a shock which I shall never get over.'

'Ah, I don't know,' and the old lady smiled. 'Time heals sorrow. You are young. I, for one, don't believe in brooding over what can't be helped. Take my advice, Mr. Meredith, get married again. I tell you, candidly, from what I have seen of you, I don't believe you ever were in love with Inez. She fascinated you. She meant to win you. And she had, it strikes me, a vast amount of influence over you. I don't know that I saw you together more than half-a-dozen times after you were married, but I am pretty 'cute. Inez had a hold on you, and you had no power to resist her.'

To this I could say nothing. I knew perfectly well it was true. Sometimes, now, I find myself pondering over the affection I once felt for Elsie Maybrick, and the passion I felt for Inez.

Elsie is still unmarried. I am not at all sure but what she

may become Mrs. Meredith even now. As for dear little Freddy Burt, he is a fine strong young man of two and twenty with every prospect of a long life before him. I went over the Linsfarne estate with him only the other day. It is, indeed, a magnificent heritage. Yet I am not sorry there is no prospect of its ever being mine. My one prayer is that he may never know how very near I once was to causing his death, and that he may live to let me nurse a little son and heir on my knee.

ANNIE G. HOPKINS.

## Professor Brankel's Secret.

AN ORIGINAL STORY.

BY FERGUS HUME.

### CHAPTER I.

[EXTRACTS FROM THE DIARY OF PROFESSOR BRANKEL.]

'Of a truth, sir, this oyster may contain a most precious jewel.'

*Heidelberg, August 26, 1876.*—Last night, having to prepare my lecture on chemistry for my students, I left my house and went to the library of the University in order to verify some remarks relative to the chemical discoveries of the fourteenth century. I had no difficulty in finding the books I wanted, all of them being well known. Just as I had finished and was about to roll up my notes, on glancing over them I saw that I had omitted to verify a remark as to Giraldus von Breen.

Giraldus von Breen was a famous but somewhat obscure alchemist of the Middle Ages whose life was wholly spent in searching after the philosopher's stone. As the point I wished to elucidate was rather important, I went back to find the 'Giraldus.' I hunted for a long time, but was unable to discover anything of the book I wanted. In despair I consulted the librarian, and he told me that he had seen a copy of the 'Giraldus' in two volumes about a year ago, but had lost sight of it since. He also added that it was but little known, and that until myself no one had inquired for it, with the exception of a young Englishman who had left Heidelberg about eight or nine months back. Under these circumstances nothing could be done, as the book was evidently not in the library; so, in despair, I took myself home in no very amiable frame of mind at my failure.

*August 27.*—I lectured to-day to my students, and during my discourse I mentioned how unfortunate I had been with regard to the 'Giraldus.' At the end of my lecture Herr Buechler, one of my students, desired to speak with me, and said he thought he could tell me where to find the 'Giraldus.' I asked him where, and he said he had lodged in the same house with a young Englishman called Black, who had left Heidelberg about eight

months ago. Of course, I immediately saw that it was the same young Englishman that the librarian had mentioned. Herr Buechler also said that the young Englishman was a great admirer of the works of Giraldus Von Breen, and that he was constantly studying them. He thought it likely that Herr Black had taken it from the library to read at his lodgings, and, as he had left a number of books behind him, it might be amongst them. I immediately accompanied Herr Buechler to the late lodgings of the young Englishman, and found there a great number of old books, principally works on chemistry. Both Herr Buechler and myself hunted for a long time without success, but at last the 'Giraldus' was found hidden under a pile of old manuscripts. Thanking Herr Buechler for his trouble, I took the 'Giraldus' home with me, and spent the night in taking notes from it for my next day's lecture on the chemistry of the fourteenth century. It was in the old black-letter type, and was bound in faded yellow leather, with the arms of Giraldus stamped upon it. I found out in a short time that I had only the first volume; doubtless the Englishman had the second, as Herr Buechler and myself had searched too thoroughly among the books to leave any doubt as to it being among them.

*August 28.*—Coming home to-night, I was smoking in my study after dinner when I caught sight of the 'Giraldus' lying on the table where I had thrown it the previous night. I took it up and began to turn over the leaves idly, when a piece of paper fell out on to the floor. I took no notice, as it was evidently only a book-mark, but went on reading and turning over the leaves. I became so absorbed in the book that three o'clock struck before I found that I had finished the book and let my pipe go out. I arose, yawned, and proposed to myself to go to bed, when I thought that I would just have one more pipe. I looked about for a piece of paper to light it, when I caught sight of the slip that had dropped out of the 'Giraldus.' It was lying under the table, and, bending forward, I picked it up. Then, twisting it up, I held it over the flame of the lamp to light it. In doing so I caught sight of some writing on it, and, being of a curious turn of mind, I withdrew it and spread it out in order to examine it. I found that it was not paper as I thought, but a piece of parchment yellow with age. It was so very dirty that on close examination all I could make out was the figure 'V' and the words '*erecipsa*' and '*is*.' I could not make out the meaning of this. I knew that the first was the Roman numeral for five, and that '*is*' was an English word, but I could not make out the meaning of

'*erecipsa*.' I examined the paper more particularly in order to see if I could find out anything likely to elucidate the mystery, and saw that there were other words which I could not make out, as the paper was so dirty and my light so dim. As this was the case, I thought it best to defer all examination of the paper until next day.

August 29.—As soon as I could get away from my duties, I hurried home eager to discover the meaning of the mysterious words on the parchment. I washed it gently in warm water in order to remove the dirt, and then, with the aid of a strong magnifying glass, I made out the words. They were in black-letter type, and I translate them word for word into modern writing. The following is a facsimile of the writing translated from the black-letter type: '*IV XII seremun sudlari G V silev erics arutuf is . . . amenev saecsim euqsatib alli taedua atiretearp erecipsa? . . . is sumina mutnat utitser alos etsev simina ni te silev ereuxe ilos metsev VVRLXXLR*.' It was evidently a cryptogram—that is, the words had been purposely thrown into confusion in order to conceal some secret. I was determined to find it out. Giraldus von Breen, although an obscure chemist, might by some strange chance have found out a great secret of nature which had escaped his more famed contemporaries. The task which I now set myself to do was to unravel the cryptogram and find out the secret it contained. The question which immediately presented itself was how to begin. There did not seem any starting-point, so I laid down the parchment in order to consider some method. By a singular coincidence I had a few months before been reading Jules Verne's scientific romance, '*A Journey into the Centre of the Earth*,' and I remembered the clever elucidation of the cryptogram therein. I went to my bookcase, and took down the romance of Monsieur Verne in order to read the part I referred to. Having done so, I again took up my own puzzle, and proceeded to find out its meaning. In the first place the figures VVRLXXLR at the end were underlined, which evidently showed that they were of great importance. They were rather disconnected from the rest of the writing. I noticed there were two figures of each kind, two fives and two tens. The thought then came into my head to add them up. The total was thirty. I then counted the words of the cryptogram (including also the Roman numerals), and I found they also came to the number of thirty. I was certain now that the figures were a key to the writing, and puzzled over it for four or five hours in order to find out the meaning. At last I gave it up in despair, and went to



bed, where I had a nightmare, and thought that I was a cryptogram somebody was trying to elucidate.

*August 30th.*—All day long I have puzzled over that cryptogram, trying to find out the connection between the figures and the writing. When I went home I shut myself up in my study, and proceeded to steadily work out the mystery. Again the figures VVRLXXLR met my eyes: and this time I noticed the letters. What might RL and LR mean? One was the reverse of the other. In puzzling over this, I noticed a Hebrew Talmud lying on my desk, which I had borrowed in order to verify a quotation. While looking at it, the thought came into my head of the strange peculiarity of the Hebrew language, being read backwards, and from right to left. As this struck me, I looked at the figures, and immediately thought of applying it.

VVRL evidently meant, read V and V from right to left, while XXLR meant read X and X from left to right. The whole number of words was thirty; and the total of the underlined figures was thirty. The cryptogram was, without doubt, divided into two sections of five words each, and two sections of ten words each, which made a total of thirty. If I counted five words from the first, and read from right to left, I would get the meaning. Then the question came, should I count five nine words, and then two tens? I thought not. If there were two fives and two tens, it would be more likely that the maker of the cryptogram only put them thus: VV, RL, XX, LR, to mislead, and that the proper way to arrange the words would be to divide them into sections of five, ten, five, ten, and read them as instructed.

Pursuing this method, I read the first five letters from right to left, the next ten from left to right, and did the same with the other two sections. This was the result:—

*sudlariG seremun II X IV.*

*silev erics arutuf is . . . . . euqsatib saecsim amenev alli  
taedua—mutnat sumina is . . . . . ? ericipsa atiretearp  
utitsev alos etsev simina ni te silev ereuxe ilos metsev.*

Arranging this in its order it came out:—

*sudlariG seremun II X IV silev erics arutuf is . . . . .  
euqsatib saecsim amenev alli taedua mutnat sumina is  
. . . . . ? ericipsa atiretearp utitsev alos etsev simina ni te  
silev ereuxe ilos metsev.*

Thus far the document had assumed a more feasible aspect, and I had great hopes of unravelling it. On looking at my last



effort, however, I found myself as far back as ever, the words made no sense. In fact, they were not words at all, but a mere jumble of letters. I laid it down at last, and betook myself to my pipe in order to ponder over some method for the solution of the problem. I caught up the romance of Jules Verne, and it opened at the twenty-eighth page. I read carelessly until I came to the last sentence of the page: 'Aha! clever Satenussenum,' he cried, 'you had first written out your sentence the wrong way.'

I immediately dashed down both book and pipe, and with a shout proceeded to apply the idea to my cryptogram with this result.

*Vestem soli exuere velis et in animis veste sola vestitu prae-terita aspicere? Si animus tantum audeat illa venema misceas bitasque. Si futura scire velis V IV X II numeres Giraldus.*

At last I had solved the problem. It was written in Latin, and oh! what vile Latin; but still I easily made it out, and write it down here in good German—

'Wouldst thou cast thy vestments of clay, walking unclad, save in thy soul garment, and view past ages? If thy spirit dareth as much, mingle then these drugs, and drink, if thou wouldst know the future add V IV X II Giraldus.'

When I read these marvellous words my brain reeled, and, staggering to the table, I filled up a glass with brandy, and drank it off. To think that I had re-discovered this wonderful secret and by the merest chance! What infinite power it would give me! By mingling these drugs—but what drugs? The cryptogram did not mention any. I got out my magnifying glass, and examined the paper carefully. At last I succeeded in making out a number of small red letters, which looked like Greek. My own magnifying glass was not powerful enough, so I sent to my brother-professor, Herr Palamam, to borrow his. When it came, I again applied myself to the red letters, and at last succeeded in making out the names. They are rare and valuable drugs, but I shall not inscribe them even in thee, my diary, for fear they should meet any prying eye. I shall share my mighty power with no one; but shall walk through the realms of the past alone.

## CHAPTER II.

EXTRACTS FROM THE DIARY OF PROFESSOR BRANKEL—*continued.*

If it is  
Within the circle of this orb'd universe,  
I'll have this secret out before the sun.

*October 16.*—After great trouble I have at last succeeded in obtaining the rare and costly drugs mentioned; I have mingled them in their due proportions as required, and the result is a colourless liquid like water, which has no taste and a faint perfume as of Eastern spices. To-night I shall try the strength of this drink for the first time, and, if it fulfils its mission, then who shall be so powerful as I! Oh, what glories I anticipate! My soul will leave this heavy clinging garb of clay; it will shake off 'this mortal coil,' as the English Shakespeare says, and roam light as air through the infinite splendour of the past. The centuries themselves will roll back before me like the flood of Jordan before the redeemed Israelites. At my bidding will Time, the insatiable, withdraw the many-tinted curtains of the past, and usher me into the presence of bygone days. I shall sweep on wings of light through the countless aeons of the past—yea, even unto the portals of creation.

*October 17.*—I have passed the night under the influence of the elixir, and the result has more than surpassed my thoughts and desires. Oh, how can I paint the sublime majesty of the scenes through which I have passed? Tongue of man cannot describe them, nor pen portray them. They, like the seven thunders in the Apocalypse, have altered their voices, and must now be sealed up—only the spiritual eye of man can behold them, and it would be vain to give even a faint reflection of their splendour. Weary does the day seem to me, and eagerly do I wait for the cool, calm night, in which I can again throw off this cumbersome dress of flesh and assume my spiritual robes. What monarch is so powerful as I? To the world I am the professor of chemistry at Heidelberg—to myself I am a demi-god, for to me alone are shown the visions of the past, and to me alone is it permitted to commune with the mighty dead.

*October 18.*—Once more have I walked through dead ages. My feet have pressed the dusty and silent floors of the palace of Time, and I have wandered spirit-clad through the deserted splendours of his mansion. But yet there remains the future. How can I lift the immutable veil which hangs before the altar of Time, and enter the Holy of Holies? How can I see with

clear eyes the splendid goal reserved for humanity, the triumphant consummation of the design of the world? What mean those last mysterious words of the cryptogram? 'If thou wouldst know the future add V IV X II, Giraldus.' I have searched through the book in vain, and I can find nothing to give me the slightest clue to their solution. What is the drug which will admit me behind the veil of Time, and compel him to show me his deepest secrets? The secret is evidently contained in the numerals; but how to discover the meaning? I have puzzled over it for hours, but as yet I am no nearer the end than before.

*October 19.*—Eureka! I have found it. At last I see the meaning of the mysterious sentence. After a sleepless night I have at last hit on what appears to be the solution of the enigma. After lengthy scrutiny I have come to the conclusion that it means the fifth word of the fourth line of the tenth page of the second volume of Giraldus. But how to get that second volume! I went to the lodgings lately occupied by the young Englishman, and turned over all his books, but was unable to find any trace of the missing volume. I questioned Herr Buechler, and he informed me that the young Englishman had been a student at the University for about two years. (I remembered him, when this was told me, as a thin, cadaverous youth, who attended my chemistry class.) He had left Heidelberg on suddenly being summoned, as he said, to the death-bed of his father. He might have taken the second volume of Giraldus with him, for he was always reading it. I asked Herr Buechler the reason. He replied that Herr Black was trying to find out the philosopher's stone, and that Giraldus gave an account of it in his second volume. I remembered then that in the first volume Giraldus says he will touch on that branch of chemistry in his second volume. After this I had not the least doubt in my mind as to the fate of the second volume of the Giraldus. Only one thing remained to me—to start for England at once, in order to get it. For such a trivial cause as the loss of a book, was I to rest contented, and not avail myself of the splendid promise held out to me? A thousand times no! I shall start as soon as possible for England. . . .

*October 29.*—I have gathered all the information concerning the young Englishman procurable, and that is very little. The information was furnished me by Herr Buechler, who told me that about two months after the departure of Herr Black from Heidelberg, he had received a letter from him, written from the Anchor Hotel, London. This is all the basis I have to go upon; I have to find out

the Anchor Hotel, and depend upon the result of my visit there for my next step. It is understood among my friends that I am going for a little trip to England—I have a letter of introduction to Professor Home, of Oxford, and one to Sir Gilbert Harkness, of Ashton Hall, Hampshire. The latter has an immense library, and a passion for collecting rare and curious books. I look to him to assist me in discovering the 'Giraldus.' But he shall never know what I want with it—no man shall possess my secret, I shall reign alone over the realms of the past.

*November 10.*—I write this portion of my diary in the Anchor Hotel, London, and I have found out some more particulars concerning the young Englishman. The Anchor Hotel is an obscure inn in a little dark street, and only frequented by the poorer class. I asked the landlord if he remembered a person named Black staying at his hotel six months ago, and described his personal appearance. The landlord is a big, fat stupid Saxon, and does not remember, but his wife, a sharp and active woman, does. She said that such a person did reside there for a month. He had paid in advance, but seemed very poor. He was always reading and muttering to himself. He left the hotel one day with all his things, saying he was going to Black's book-stall, and since then nothing had been heard of him. Thanking the landlord's wife, I set off in search of Black's book-stall. Perhaps Black is his father; he is evidently some relation, or perhaps the book-stall is his own.

*November 11.*—I have hunted all day without success. Black's book-stall is not very well known, but towards the end of the day I met a policeman who told me there was a book-stall of that name, he thought, in Van Street. I am going to-morrow to see.

*November 12.*—I have found Black's book-stall, but not the 'Giraldus.' I went to Van Street, and found it there as described by the policeman. It was wedged up between two tall houses, and had a crushed appearance. I entered, and asked to see some book which I named. The owner of the book-stall was a little old man with white hair, dressed in a rusty black suit, and took snuff. I led the conversation up to a certain point, and then asked him if he had a son. He said yes, but that his son was dead. He said that he had sent him to Germany to study about three years ago, but had returned and died only three months back. I told him who I was, and the old man seemed pleased. He had been very proud of his son. I asked him if his son had brought home with him from Germany the second volume of the works of Giraldus Von Breen. The old man thought for a long time, and replied that he had done so. I asked him where the book now was. He

said he had sold it to a literary gentleman about a month ago. I asked the name of the purchaser. The book-stall keeper could not tell me, but he said the gentleman had the largest library of old books in England, and had said he was writing a history of chemistry. It must be Sir Gilbert Harkness. He has a very large library, and I know that he is writing a history of chemistry, for I was told so in Germany. He must have required the 'Giraldus' for reference. I thanked the old man, and left the book-stall. There is no doubt in my mind now but that the book I seek is in the library of Sir Gilbert Harkness. I start for his place to-morrow.

### CHAPTER III.

#### IN THE LIBRARY.

Behold this pair, and note their divers looks,  
A man of letters and a man of books,  
With various knowledge each is stuffed and crammed. Oh !  
Yes, they are indeed 'arcades ambo.'

SIR GILBERT HARKNESS was a bookworm. All his life he had fed and fattened on books, until they had become part of himself. When they (the books) found themselves in the citadel of his heart, they turned and devoured all the other passions until the heart of their victim was emptied of all save themselves. Sir Gilbert found himself at the age of fifty with a brain weary of its cumbersome load of knowledge, and eyes dim with long study to acquire the same cumbersome load. Left an orphan at the age of twenty, master of his own actions and a magnificent fortune, he had spent all his time and much of his money in filling the shelves of his library. He spared no cost in procuring any rare and valuable book, and on his frequent visits to London he would be found turning over the dusty treasures of the old book-stalls with eager hands. The nature of the man could be seen at once by the way in which he smoothed and caressed his treasures. Oh, how tenderly did he brush the dust off the back of some antique volume, and how gloatingly did his eyes dwell on its yellow pages, as it displayed their store of black-letter type ! He honoured Fust and Caxton above all men, and looked up to them with as much reverence as the world does to its great heroes. He would descant for hours on the extraordinary excellence of the printing of John de Spira, and would show with pride a quaint old folio of Caxton which he had picked up in some dingy book-stall. But the dragon-like propensities of his books had devoured all the rest of his



passions, and beyond his library he was a man childish and simple. He never went out save on some bookish expedition, but passed all his days in his great library, cataloguing his treasures and writing his History of German Chemistry. In order to give an exhaustive and critical work on this subject, he had collected at enormous expense a great number of famous books by German chemists. He was a tall, thin man, with a stoop, caused doubtless by his sedentary habits; and clad in his long velvet dressing-gown, with his thin white hair scattered from under a velvet skull-cap, he looked like a magician of mediævalism.

He was standing by the quaint diamond-paned window of his library, examining a book which he had just received from London, and his eyes, dim and blear with work, were bent on the yellow page in a severe scrutiny of the text. All around him were books from floor to ceiling, in all kinds of binding, in all shapes and sizes. They had overflowed the shelves, and were piled in little heaps here and there upon the floor. They were scattered on all the chairs, they were heaped upon his writing-table, they were lying on the edge of the window, they peered out of all the pockets of his dressing-gown—wherever the eye turned it saw nothing but books, books, books!

Good Heavens! What a quantity of human learning and industry was collected between those four walls! East, west, north, south; ancient, mediæval, and modern representatives of all time and all countries were there. O shades of Fust, Guttenberg, and Caxton, if, indeed, it is permitted to spirits to revisit the 'glimpses of the moon,' come hither and feast your spiritual eyes on your progeny! Behold! in these myriad bindings, many-coloured as the coat of Joseph, is the spirit of past ages preserved. Here you will find the supreme singer of the world, Shakespeare himself, fast bound betwixt these boards, and as securely prisoned as ever the genius was under the seal of Solomon in the Arabian tale. Open yon grim brown folio, and lo! Homer will step forth, followed by all the fresh untrodden generations of the world. Ulysses with his sea-weary eyes eagerly straining for the low rocky coast of Ithaca. Helen with her imperial beauty standing on the towers of Illium. Achilles with his angry face set fierce against the walls of windy Troy, over the dead body of his friend. All, all, are there, and will appear to thee in their fresh eternal beauty if thou sayest but the word. Truly the deftest necromancer of the Middle Ages held not half the airy spirits and fantastic fancies under the spell of his wand as thou dost, O Gilbert Harkness!

Outside, the short November twilight is closing in, and Sir Gilbert finds that the fat black letters are all running into one blurred line under his eager eyes. A knock at the door of his library disturbs him, and it is with a spirit of relief that he pitches the volume on the table and calls 'Come in.' A servant enters with a card which Sir Gilbert takes to the window and reads in the failing, grey light, 'Otto Brankel.'

'Show the gentleman in,' he says, and then looks at the card again. 'Brankel? Brankel?' he murmurs in a dreamy tone; where have I heard that name? Nuremberg? Leipsic?'

'No! Heidelberg,' interrupts a voice, and looking up he sees a tall, slender man wrapped in a fur greatcoat, regarding him with a smile.

'Heidelberg,' repeated Sir Gilbert. 'Ah, yes; are you not the professor of chemistry there?'

'I have that honour,' replied the visitor, sinking with a complacent sigh into the chair indicated by the baronet. 'I must apologise for this untimely visit, but I have a letter of introduction to you from Professor Schlaadt, and I was so impatient that I thought I would lose no time, but present it at once.'

The baronet took the letter, and glancing rapidly over it shook the professor warmly by the hand.

'I am delighted to make your acquaintance, Professor,' he said eagerly. 'I have heard a great deal about your learning and research.'

'A mere nothing,' said the Professor, with a deprecating glance and a wave of his hand; 'mere scraps of knowledge, picked out of the infinite ocean of learning. You have a wonderful collection of books here. I heard about your library in Germany;' and he cast a keen glance round into all the dark corners of the room.

'Ah! you do not see all,' said Sir Gilbert, with a grateful smile, as the servant brought in a lamp and placed it on the writing table; 'this dim light does not show it to advantage.'

'The fame of it has penetrated to Heidelberg,' said the Professor, languidly, with another glance round.

'Perhaps that is because I have so many of your German works on chemistry,' returned Sir Gilbert. 'You know I am writing a History of Chemistry.'

'Have you any alchemists of the fourteenth century?—any of their works I mean?' asked Brankel with a faint glow of interest.

'Oh, yes,' answered the Baronet, pointing towards a dark cor-

ner of the library, whither the Professor's eye eagerly followed him. 'You will find there Rostham von Helme Gradious Giralduſ.'"

The Professor's hands were reſting lightly on the arms of the chair, but at the laſt word he gave a convulſive clutch. He, however, merely obſerved, coldly :

"Giralduſ" is rather a rare book, is it not?"

'Yes,' replied the Baronet ſlowly. 'I got it by a curious chance. I——'

'Oh, Governor! Governor!' cried a clear ringing voice, and a young lady in a riding habit, all ſplashed with mud, ſtepped lightly through the window into the room.

'Such a ſplendid run. Fiddle-de-dee carried me ſplendidly. I was in at the death,' diſplaying a fox's brush—'ſo was Jack. I was the only lady; we came home in about half an hour—both nags quite worn out, which I am ſure I don't wonder at. Jack has behaved like a trump all day, ſo as a reward I have brought him to dinner—Come in, Jack.'

A young gentleman in a hunting coſtume, likewise ſplashed with mud, in reply to this invitation alſo came in through the window. He was advancing with a ſmile towards Sir Gilbert when the young lady ſuddenly caught ſight of the Professor, who had riſen at her entry and was ſtanding ſomewhat in the ſhade.

'Viſitor, dad?' ſhe ſaid careleſſly, ſhifting the folds of her riding habit, which was lying on her arm. 'Introduce me, dear.'

'My daughter—Philippa—Professor Brankel,' ſaid Sir Gilbert in a vexed tone.

'I do wiſh, Philippa, you would come in at the door like a Chriſtian and not in at the window like a——'

'Pagan; eh, dad?' ſaid Philippa with a laugh.

She was looking at the Professor, and his eyes ſeemed to have a magnetic attraction for her. The German had ſtepped out of the ſhade, and the light of the lamp was ſtriking full on his face, which the girl regarded curiouſly. It was a remarkable face—a deadly white complexion with jet black hair, all brushed back from a high forehead; black, buſhy eyebrows, with a Mephiſtofelian curve over light and brilliant eyes, a thin hooked noſe, and a nervous cruel mouth with neither mouſtache nor beard. Such was the countenance of the famous German profeſſor of chemistry.'

Philippa appeared fascinated by this weird countenance ſtaring at her with flaſhing eyes. And yet ſhe was not a girl much given to being fascinated—rather the oppoſite—a bold audacious nature which did not know fear. But there was ſome-



thing in the steady burning gaze of the German that mastered her at once.

She was a tall slender girl, very beautiful, with masses of dark hair coiled under a coquettish hat set daintily on the side of her head. Her eyes flashed with a mixture of fun and mischief, while her rather large mouth displayed a row of very white teeth when she smiled. She looked charming in her dark blue riding habit and white gloves, with a linen collar at her throat caught by a dainty brooch. She was an extremely self-possessed and self-willed young woman. Her mother died when she was quite a baby, and being neglected by her father, who was too busy with his library to attend to her, the education she received was of a loose and somewhat desultory kind. Sometimes she would learn and then astonish everybody with the rapidity of her progress. At other times she would refuse to open a single book, and alternately teased and delighted her friends by her fantastic moods.

She was a splendid rider, and most of her childhood's days were spent in scampering about the country with her Shetland pony and Jack.

Jack, otherwise Lord Dulchester, was the eldest son of the Earl of Chesham, whose estate was next to that of Sir Gilbert Harkness. Jack and Philippa were always together, and the wild young lady followed Jack into whatever scrapes he chose to lead her. She copied Jack's manners and speech, and consequently became rather full of slang expressions. But the longest lane has a turning, and at length Sir Gilbert awoke to the fact that something must be done with his erratic offspring. He wrote to his married sister in London, and she promptly suggested a French boarding-school. So one morning Miss Philippa was violently seized and sent into exile; at the same time her companion-in-mischief, Jack, went to Eton. When Miss Harkness returned from her Gallic exile, she found Jack unaltered, and he found her as jolly as ever (so he put it). Their positions, however, were altered, and instead of Philippa following Jack, Jack followed Philippa. He admired her as being the only girl who could ride straight across country and discuss horses in a proper way. Besides, he had known her such a long time that he had had plenty of opportunity of seeing any faults in her, and he had seen none. Having come to the conclusion that she was 'the jolliest girl he had ever met,' he rode over one morning and promptly asked her to marry him, which Philippa as promptly refused, politely telling him not to be an idiot. But Lord Dulchester

persisted, and ultimately Miss Harkness—who really did like him—accepted him, and they were engaged. All the county ladies talked of her as ‘that misguided girl,’ and lamented that Sir Gilbert had not married again in order to give one of the female sex an opportunity to initiate Philippa into the intricacies of good breeding. They were horrified at her fast ways and strong expressions, which even her French education could not eradicate. It was rumoured one time that she had actually smoked a whole cigarette, and Philippa had laughingly acknowledged the fact to a lady who questioned her about it. When she secured in Lord Dulchester the matrimonial prize of the county, the ladies loved her none the more, you may be sure. They accepted her as an unpleasant fact, and hoped she would improve in time. And the male sex liked Philippa because she was handsome and said witty things about her neighbours; but it was generally acknowledged that she had a wild eye in her head, and would need breaking in, a task which they did not think Lord Dulchester capable of.

That gentleman was a tawny-haired, clean-limbed son of Anak, who stood six feet, and could ride, shoot, and box better than any man in the county.

He was good-looking and had a title, but no brains, and he adored Philippa.

Miss Harkness withdrew her eyes from the remarkable face before her with an uneasy laugh, and introduced Lord Dulchester.

‘You are going to stay to dinner, of course, Professor?’ said Sir Gilbert.

The Professor bowed, whilst Philippa hurried away to dress for dinner.

Jack followed soon to make himself a little decent, for the dress in which a man has done a hard day’s hunting is certainly not the most presentable for dining.

The Professor was left alone with Sir Gilbert, and as he looked at him he thought:

‘I wonder where the “Giraldus” is?’

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.

Do you believe, sir, in metempsychosis ?  
Of course you don't, but I can tell you, sir,  
He was a serpent ere he was a man.

THERE is no more charming hour in the whole day than the dinner hour, and especially after a hard day's hunting. At least so Lord Dulchester thought. In spite of his splashed hunting dress (which he had made as presentable as he could) he felt a sweet, lazy kind of happiness as he sat down at the dinner table.

The white cloth, the hothouse flowers, the gleaming and antique silver and delicate china, all assembled under the soft light of rose-coloured lamps, made up a very pleasant picture, and Lord Dulchester felt at peace with all mankind.

Beside him sat Philippa, dark and handsome in her rich dinner dress, as she toyed with her soup and discussed the day's sport.

At the head of the table sat Sir Gilbert, holding an animated conversation on books with the Professor, who was seated near him.

Dulchester had taken a great dislike to the German, and set him down in his own mind as a charlatan, although what reason he had for doing so Heaven only knows.

Perhaps the silvery fluency of the foreigner's conversation, together with the mesmeric glances of his wonderful eye, helped him to the conclusion.

At any rate, the presence of the Professor was to him the one discordant element of the evening.

'I am quite ashamed of my dress, Sir Gilbert,' he said. 'I wanted to go home and change it, but Phil would not let me.'

'Of course not,' retorted that young lady with a laugh, 'you would have arrived here about midnight.'

'But I am sure you need not apologise so much,' she went on merrily; 'you have done the same thing plenty of times before, and each time you have excused yourself in the same manner. Why don't you practise what you preach?'

'Because you won't let me,' said Jack with a laugh, coolly pouring himself out a glass of wine.

'You had good sport to-day?' asked the Professor, fixing his piercing eyes on Jack.

'Slashing,' replied that young man enthusiastically, setting

down his glass, which was half-way to his mouth, in order to give more freedom to his eloquence.

‘You should have seen the spin the fox led us. We caught him this side of Masterton’s Mill. There was one beautiful hedge and ditch which half the field refused, but Miss Harkness cleared it like a bird, and I followed. I think we were neck and neck, Phil, across the next field,’ he added, addressing that young lady, who was listening with flashing eyes.

‘Rather,’ she answered vivaciously; and ‘by Jove, Jack, what a smash old Squire Damer came!’

‘Right into the middle of the ditch.’

‘He would insist on giving me the lead, and I did laugh when I saw him flying in the air like a fat goose.’

‘Serve him right,’ growled Jack, who did not think anyone had a right to give Miss Harkness a lead but himself. He’s too old for that sort of thing.’

‘Oh yes! You will knock off hunting when you reach his age, eh Jack?’ said Philippa sarcastically.

‘Well, I won’t ride so many stone, at any rate,’ retorted Jack, evasively applying himself vigorously to his plate to prevent the possibility of a reply.

Philippa laughed, and then began talking about some newly-imported mare with miraculous powers of endurance and speed ascribed to her.

Jack responded enthusiastically, and their conversation became so ‘horsey’ as to be unintelligible, except to a Newmarket trainer or one of Whyte-Melville’s heroes.

Meanwhile, the two scholars were holding an equally mystical conversation in the higher branches of knowledge on the other side of the table.

At last the Professor, by skilful generalship, led the conversation round to the subject dearest to his heart.

‘You were going to tell me where you got the “Giraldus,”’ he said, carelessly playing with his glass.

‘Ah, yes,’ answered Sir Gilbert, leaning back in his chair. ‘It was a most curious chance. I was greatly in want of his works, but had not the least idea where to get them. I went up to London, to see my agent about looking through the Continental libraries for them, when one day I found out an old book-stall, kept by a man named Black.’

‘Yes?’ interrogatively.

‘Well, he had it,’ replied Sir Gilbert, nodding his head, ‘that

is, only the second volume. He said it had been brought from Germany by his son, who had lately died.'

'But it is only the second volume.'

'I wish I knew where the first was.'

'I think I can satisfy your curiosity,' said the German coolly, bending forward; 'the first volume is in the library at Heidelberg.'

'Indeed!' Sir Gilbert looked amazed. 'How did the two volumes come to be separated?'

'The son of the book-stall keeper whom you mention,' said the Professor, twisting a ring on his finger round and round, 'was a student at the Heidelberg University. He was a great admirer of the works of Giraldus, and leaving Heidelberg hurriedly, he carried it with him to England—that is, of course, the second volume only. I found the first by a mere chance in his lodgings.'

'Why! were you looking for it?' asked Sir Gilbert.

'Yes,' answered Brankel. 'I wanted to illustrate a certain point to my class, which I was unable to do satisfactorily without the aid of Giraldus.'

'I must send this second volume back to Heidelberg,' said the book-worm in a vexed tone, 'as it was taken from there.'

'I don't see it,' replied the Professor calmly. 'Giraldus is a very obscure alchemist, and if you send the value of the book to the University, I dare say you can have the first volume also. By-the-by, Sir Gilbert, I think I omitted to tell you that I intend to stay in England for at least six months, and any assistance I can afford you I shall be most happy.'

'Oh, thank you,' answered the Baronet eagerly. 'I shall be delighted to avail myself of it. Where are you staying?'

'At present at an hotel in Launceston,' answered the German, 'but I have taken a house near you, which I am about to fit up. I shall be established in it in about a week, and then you may expect to see me in your library pretty frequently.'

'I shall be glad,' said Sir Gilbert; 'but where is the house you have taken?'

'It is called Wolfden,' replied the Professor.

'Wolfden?' exclaimed Philippa catching the name. 'Are you going to live *there*, Professor?'

'Yes, why not?' he asked, rather amused at her sudden entry into the conversation.

'It is such a gloomy place,' she answered, with a little nervous laugh, for those serpent eyes were fixed upon her, 'and has not



been inhabited for the last twenty years, except by the ghost of the former proprietor, who hanged himself.'

'Ghost? Bah,' said the Professor with a sneer, which wrinkled up the corners of his thin mouth. 'I'm not afraid of that. This is the nineteenth century.'

'Well, ghosts or no ghosts, I wouldn't live there,' replied Philippa gaily as she rose, 'it's extremely damp, and bad for the health.' And with a bow she swept out of the door, which the Professor held open for her, for which civility he was rewarded by a frown from Lord Dulchester, who considered that as his special province.

The two *savants* began to discuss chemistry over their wine, so Lord Dulchester, after moodily toying with his glass for some minutes, rose and went off to the drawing-room in search of Miss Harkness.

He found that young lady seated by the fire, staring dreamily into the heart of the red coals.

He came forward, and, leaning his elbow on the mantel-piece, looked down on her with a smile.

'Dreaming, Phil?' he asked softly, as he looked into her face, ringed round with the flare of the fire.

'I was thinking of the Professor, Jack,' she said abstractedly, leaning back and folding her hands. 'Is he not a strange man?'

'I don't like him,' retorted Jack bluntly.

'Nor do I,' she answered, 'but he has a very remarkable face: like Mephistofeles. I don't read much poetry, but when I saw his eyes I could not help thinking they were like the witch's in *Cristabel*—like a serpent's.'

'Does he stay here long?' asked Dulchester, giving the fire a poke with the toe of his hunting-boot, and thereby causing the downfall of a fantastical castle of burning coal.

'About six months,' answered Philippa. 'Hand me the screen, Jack; you have made the fire so hot that it is scorching my face.'

Jack did so, and, kneeling down beside her, looked up in her face with a laugh.

'Let us put away all thought of this Professor, sweetheart,' he said, catching her hand, 'and talk of something interesting.'

It must have been very interesting, for Sir Gilbert and the Professor, coming into the room half an hour afterwards, found them in the same position, with Philippa's hand straying through Jack's chestnut curls.

When discovered thus, Jack sprang to his feet with a growl, and became deeply interested in a picture hanging near him, while Miss Harkness directed her attentions to the Chinese pictorial representations on her screen.

The Professor looked at them with a kind of half-sneer, which made Jack long to 'punch the beggar's head,' and then, at Philippa's request, went to the piano, and began to play. Sir Gilbert was sound asleep in his arm-chair by the fire: Jack sat opposite him with his arm resting on his knee and his chin in his hand, staring at Philippa, who was flirting with her fan and staring into the fire.

Away in the semi-darkness, sat the Professor at the piano, playing *morceaux* of Mendelssohn and Schubert. The situation truly 'had its charm,' as Jack thought; but again the presence of the German seemed an unsympathetic element. Besides, Jack did not care for soft music, and preferred the lusty hunting songs of Whyte-Melville to all the pathos and melody of the masters of music.

Yet there was a kind of dreamy soporific tendency about the Professor's playing which, at that time, seemed eminently satisfactory.

Suddenly the Professor stopped playing, and began to speak.

'I will play a composition of my own,' he said slowly. 'It is called "A Dream-phantasy."'

He commenced to play again, beginning with a low crescendo of minor arpeggios in the bass, gradually ascending and becoming louder and more agitated, then changing the tempo and dreamily gliding into the swing and rhythm of a cradle-song, as if waves of sleep were softly closing over the head of the dreamer.

Then with an introductory prelude of sharp, clear chords came a grand movement in march-time, with the thunder and tread of many feet, and the silver sound of trumpets drifting into a sorrowful and pathetic melody, which seemed full of the grief and pathos of death.

A shower of silvery tones like the falling of summer rain on the sea, and then a wild, delicious waltz, fantastic and capricious as one of Chopin's ethereal compositions.

Then followed a beautifully smooth modulation with wondrous extended harmonies, and the player glided into a quaint barcarolle, as if a boat were afloat on the breast of a calm summer sea, sailing towards the burning heart of the sunset, and drifting.

'By Jove! you know, Jack, I think the run to-day was the best of the season.'

Philippa had been thinking for a long time before she delivered this eminently commonplace remark.

The Professor thought that she was listening to his music, whereas her thoughts were far away with the red-coated field, with the gallant fox flying ahead.

He shut down the piano with a crash, and rose to go.

'You will come over to-morrow,' said Sir Gilbert, as he shook hands.

'Certainly,' answered the Professor, with a smile. 'Good-night, Lord Dulchester; you don't come my way?'

'No, I am going to ride home,' answered Dulchester, who had no fancy for a talk with this foreigner.

'I will send the carriage with you, Professor,' said Sir Gilbert, going to the bell.

'Thanks—no,' returned the German, politely stopping him. 'I prefer to walk. Good-night once more, and good-night to you, Miss Philippa. I see you do not care much for good music.'

And with this parting shaft, the Professor bowed himself out, with his cold and sardonic sneer, leaving Philippa angry with herself at having betrayed her thoughts so far, and Lord Dulchester with an unholy desire in his heart to 'punch the foreign beggar's head.'

*(To be continued.)*



## Professor Brankel's Secret.

AN ORIGINAL STORY.

BY FERGUS HUME.

### CHAPTER V.

#### THE EFFECT OF THE ELIXIR.

Dreams are the nightly progeny of sleep,  
The ghostly visitants which mock our rest ;  
And yet methinks they give a sovereignty  
Within their airy realms to many a wight,  
Who wakes to find himself a ragged knave,  
And all the rainbow pageants of the night  
Only the idle bubbles of the brain.

*Launceston, November 14.*—At last I have found the second volume of 'Giraldus.' By a strange train of circumstances I have been led step by step towards this successful end. Nothing now remains for me to do but to go over to Sir Gilbert's library, take up the 'Giraldus,' and turn to the page indicated by the cryptogram.

Then shall I be able to supply the missing drug and put the final touch to this marvellous elixir. I have no fear of Sir Gilbert ever dreaming why I am so anxious about the 'Giraldus.' And, truth to tell, he cannot even notice that I am anxious, for I carefully repress all manifestations of interest concerning it beyond that of an admirer of rare books.

I heard him mention to-day where it was in his library with as cool and composed a manner as if I never heard of the book, while every vein in my body was tingling with excitement. However, I must now curb my impatience until I can see the book in the ordinary course. Sir Gilbert is a man wholly devoted to his books, and his desires are bounded by the overflowing shelves of his library. He asked me to stay to dinner, and I was introduced to his daughter and her lover. The lover is one of the aristocracy—a brainless young athlete, with the body of a Milo and the intellect, as Walter Savage Landor says, 'of a lizard.' But Miss Philippa Harkness, the daughter, is a very strange young woman. It is a long time since I have studied Lavater, and possibly my skill in physiognomy may have declined, but I have rarely seen a

more contradictory face. She has intellect, but does not use it. As far as I can see she has not even the average education of an English lady; all her talk is about field sport and horses, while her conversation is full of words which I am certain are not in the English dictionary—at least, not as far as my acquaintance with it goes. She could be clever if she would, but she will not, for one of the most powerful passions of Nature is wanting in her. She is not ambitious, and is quite content to pass the days of her life as her senses dictate, without attempting to rise to eminence.

Strange that Nature, the bounteous, should be so capricious. To one she gives no talents, but ambition; while to this girl she gives talents and no ambition.

During the evening I made the discovery that Miss Harkness does not like me. She talked gaily and courteously enough, but she avoided my eye, and seemed ill at ease when I addressed her. I suppose it is my manner. A scholastic occupation is certainly not the best for acquiring graces, and I am always rather awkward in the presence of women. I also made the discovery during the evening that she has no soul—at least, not for music. When I was playing my 'Dream Phantasy,' she suddenly broke in with some remark about her day's sport. Bah! why should I be angry? and yet it wounded my self-esteem. I thought that my playing would hold anyone spell-bound, and now I find that it has no effect on this woman. If I took the trouble to hate anybody, I should hate this girl. But I never trouble. Her nature is quite opposite to mine, and we seem to have a mutual distrust and dislike of one another. Strange I never felt like this before. I had better get over this absurd feeling, as I am to see her almost daily for the next six months. In the meantime all my thoughts are concentrated on the 'Giraldus.' By this time to-morrow I shall know the secret drug, and then—— I must go over to-morrow and look up the 'Giraldus' without delay. . . .

Professor Brankel closed his diary and then prepared for bed. Before he put out the light he went to his desk and took out a small phial filled with a colourless liquid. He took three drops out of the bottle and swallowed them. Then, putting the phial away again, he went to bed, and was soon away in visions begat by the strange power of the elixir.

Behold I stand under the shadows of a moonless and starless night, divested of that gross garment of clay which is the emblem of mortality. The immortal part of myself is severed from the

mortal, and I am an airy spirit, nameless and soulless, for I myself am the soul. Nothing of earth has any part in me ; I am formed of the ethereal essence which God breathes into the body of man. I have no feelings, physical or mental, but stand a naked human soul, a citizen of the universe, a partaker of eternity. Time draws back the veil of the past, and I enter into the vast halls of his palace, to wander through the populous courts, and see the splendid kaleidoscope of humanity and the marvellous colours which the iridescent dome of life has thrown on the white surface of eternity.

. . . I stand within the mighty arena of the Colosseum, and above me, tier above tier, I see the blood-loving Roman populace gazing down with wolfish eyes on the blood-stained sands. The bright blue sky gleams every now and then through the striped awning which shadows the heads of the people. There is Horace, fresh from his little Sabine farm, laughing with Mæcenas ; Virgil, with a placid smile on his face, listening to the witty and epigrammatical conversation of Catullus—the Rochester of his day—who is amusing his fickle Lesbia with remarks on the spectators. And he, the master of the world, rose-crowned, looks down with a serene face at the long train of gladiators. *Ave Cæsar!* . . . The fight begins . . . a battle of Titans. . . . See how their eyes flash . . . how the sparks fly from their shields at every blow. And Fortune, fickle as a woman, gives her favours sometimes to one and then to another. . . . See, one has fallen . . . and his triumphant adversary stands over him, looking round meanwhile to see the verdict of the people. . . . *Habet!* . . . And the blood of the conquered sinks into the thirsty sands of the arena—insatiable of blood as the masters of the world. . . .

. . . Is it thou, O Athens, the omphalos of Greece . . . set like a jewel in the midst of thy green groves, and filled with all the superb intellects of antiquity? . . . Behold the great white streets . . . the vivid, sparkling crowd brimming over with veritable Aristophanic humour . . . the wrangling of the philosophers and their pupils from the porticoes, and the god-like figures of the youths as they haste to the gymnasium. . . . Yes, this is indeed the intellectual capital of the world. . . . The great theatre, with the semicircle of eager faces gazing spell-bound at the splendid pageantry of the ‘Agamemnon.’ . . . The deep-mouthed roll of the Eschylean line fills the wide-ringed theatre with a sublime thunder, and then goes echoing down the

vaulted corridors of Time with ever-increasing volume. . . . How magnificent . . . the fiery ring of the speech of Clytemnestra . . . the stately eloquence of the king of men . . . the wild cry of Cassandra, shrinking back with prophetic horror from the blood-stained threshold of the palace. . . . See. . . . Chorus. . . . [Here the entries in the diary become illegible.]

Hail, Queen with the snow-white breasts and eyes of fire. . . . I pray you, wherefore do you look from the mighty walls of wide-streeted Troy so eagerly? . . . Helen . . . fairest and most imperial of women, thy fatal beauty hath doomed the proud towers of Ilium. Think not that yonder light at which thou gazest as it gleams like a crimson-hearted star . . . think not that it comes from the tent of thy forsaken husband. . . .

. . . It lights the funeral couch of Patroclus, and beneath its beam sits the sullen-faced Achilles, gazing with wrathful eyes at the dimly-seen walls of Troy. . . . Ai! . . . Ai! . . . The end is near, O Queen. . . . Thy fatal beauty hath worked out its evil destiny . . . and already the irrevocable fiat has gone forth from the Fates. . . . Ai! Ai!

. . . Crafty Ulysses, with the cautious wrinkles round thy deep-set eyes, I pray thee tell me where thou art going. . . . Ithaca! . . . Push off the galley from the shores of Troy. . . . Unloose the ten years' bound sail . . . and let us sail across the foaming leagues of perilous seas in search of thine island home. . . . Lo! how the great sea freshens and whitens under the caress of the winds, and we feel the salt breath of the wandering fields of foam of large savour in our nostrils. . . . But lo! what purple land gleams dimly in the distance? . . . Lotus-eaters. . . . [Here the diary is illegible.] . . . See . . . how the nymphs sport in the crystal waters . . . the flash of their white bodies and the waving of dishevelled locks. . . . Ithaca! . . . Turn the galley home to where the ever-weaving Penelope awaits thee. . . . Ah, Ithaca! . . .

. . . Oh, clash and clamour of music . . . the light tread of slave-girls scattering flowers . . . the barbaric gleam of scarlet and gold . . . the martial bearing of the Roman soldiers . . . and she—the serpent of the Nile—comes for her Roman lover. . . . Ah, Cleopatra . . . Egypt . . . he with the serene face, that stretches out his arms to thee, would sustain the great diadem of the world on his brow, but for thee, dark-browed gipsy. . . . Hark, how the shrill music sounds . . . he comes . . . Anthony. . . .

. . . Ancient Egypt, mysterious and marvellous, wrapped in the deepest mists of antiquity. . . . Long, slumbrous ranges of palaces . . . long trains of painted figures on the walls . . . and symbolical hieroglyphics. . . . Lift up the dense veil which shrouds thy mysterious . . . countenance, O Isis. . . . Behold how the solemn sphynxes in silent lines gaze wide-eyed at the mysterious Pyramids. . . . O mysterious Egypt . . . hail . . . Osiris . . . Thoth. . . . [Here the diary becomes illegible.]

. . . Strike the timbrel, for Miriam, the prophetess of the Lord, sings a pæan of victory, and her great brother towers sublime over the redeemed Israelites. . . . Golgotha. . . . Calvary. . . . The Cross. . . . who . . . who hangs upon it so still and lifeless? . . . Behind . . . reddens the evening sky, and the Cross hangs like a thunder-cloud over Jerusalem. . . . Is it then true . . . this which I deemed a fable? . . . Didst thou die for humanity, O Christ? . . . Ah, lift not those pain-charged eyes, O Nazarene! . . . see how the red blood drips from thy thorn-wreathed diadem . . . Prophet . . . Christianity . . . I am in space, the centre of the . . . great wheel of the universe . . . around throng the nebulous masses of worlds . . . and this heaving mass of fire, is this the earth? . . . I stand before the portals of creation. . . . Open! . . . God. . . . Fire. . . . Chaos! . . .

The fresh morning breaks slowly in the East, and the dreamer awakes to the reality of life.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE LAST INGREDIENT OF THE ELIXIR.

A rarer drug

Than all the perfumed spices of the East.

PHILIPPA was seated at the window of the breakfast-room, dressed in her riding habit. She was going to ride that morning with Lord Dulchester, and was waiting his arrival with some impatience, for she longed to be in the saddle. She was reading the 'Field,' her favourite paper, and every now and then glancing at the clock or bending down to caress the huge staghound lying at her feet. At last with a laugh she arose, pitched the paper on the floor, and stepped out on the terrace followed by her dog.

It was a cold, clear morning, with a brisk wind blowing which brought the blood into Philippa's cheeks in no time. There were



a number of pigeons on the terrace, but at her approach they flew away, and she saw them, whirling specks of white, in the cold, blue sky. Miss Harkness stood staring at them for some time, and then, giving her dog's ears a malicious pull, she began to talk to herself.

'I never did see anyone like that Jack of mine—he is always late; it is about half an hour since the time I told him. Ah, there's that dear old pater hard at work; I think I shall go in and see him.'

The window of the library was open, so, stepping lightly in, she went over to her father. He was bending over his writing-table examining a stray leaf of some book, and looked up with a bewildered expression when her shadow fell on him.

'Well, pater,' she said gaily, laying her gloved hand on his shoulder, 'hard at work? Why don't you come out for a ride, instead of sitting all day among these musty old books?'

'Bless me, Philippa, how you talk,' answered her father peevishly. 'How can I spare the time? Besides, Professor Brankel is coming over to see the library to-day.'

Philippa turned round without a word and went on to the terrace, where she stood carelessly flicking at the leaves of a cypress which grew near, and thinking deeply. Her dog lay down at her feet and put his nose between his paws, keeping one bright eye sharply on his mistress while the other blinked half-asleep. The thoughts of Miss Harkness were not of a pleasant nature. She had forgotten all about the German, and her father's reminder had brought to her the unpleasant fact that there was such a person. She was not by any means a young lady given to fancies, and yet there was something about this Professor she did not like. Although not of an imaginative tendency, there was something in his eyes that seemed to fascinate her, and again she thought of Christabel.

'It's one comfort I shall be away all day,' she muttered to herself, 'and he will be gone by the time I come home—that is, if the pater does not ask——'

'Phil! Phil!' cried a voice almost immediately beneath her, and on looking over she saw her tardy lover, mounted on a splendid horse, and looking handsome and fresh, as a young Briton ought to look on riding five miles on a cold morning, with his lady-love at the end of the fifth mile.

'How late you are, Jack!' she cried, catching up her gloves and flying down the steps. 'I've been waiting about an hour.'

'Couldn't get away,' replied Dulchester, who had dismounted,

and was looking with pride at her handsome, eager face. 'The governor wanted to consult me about some things, and it was with great difficulty I could come even now.'

'I am to take that explanation with a grain of salt,' laughed Philippa, whose horse had now been brought round.

'Just as you like—with or without salt,' retorted Jack, coolly flinging the reins of his horse to the groom, and standing ready to assist her to mount.

She gave a saucy laugh, put her small foot on his hand, and in another moment was in the saddle. She gathered up her reins, and gave Fiddle-de-dee a sharp stroke with her whip, which caused him to dance about in the most alarming manner.

'Now then, Phil, are you ready?' asked Lord Dulchester, who had mounted his own horse and was steering it beside hers.

'Aye, aye, sir,' and away they went down the avenue, leaving the grooms looking after them with intense admiration.

'They're a rare couple,' said one to the other.

'Aye, the finest this part o' the country,' and with a laugh both went inside.

Meanwhile Miss Harkness and her lover had reached the park gates, and had just passed through them when they saw the Professor coming along the road. Philippa's heart gave a jump as she saw those gleaming eyes fixed on hers once more.

'Good-morning,' Miss Harkness,' said the Professor; 'I see you are indulging in your favourite pastime. I am just going to see Sir Gilbert.'

'You will find him in the library,' said Philippa, bowing coldly, while Dulchester passed him with a curt 'Good-morning.'

The Professor stood looking after them with a sneer on his face as they rode away laughing and chatting merrily, and the same envy of their happiness came into his heart as Satan felt when he saw Adam and Eve in the garden—

Oh, Hell, what do mine eyes with grief behold?

The feeling, however, soon passed, and with a shrug of his shoulders he resumed his way.

He was immediately ushered into the library on his arrival at the Hall, and found his master anxiously expecting his arrival.

'Ah, Professor!' he said, shaking him heartily by the hand, 'I am so delighted you have come. I want to find out a certain point; but first I must show you all my treasures.'

The Professor assented with delight, for he felt the true joy of a bibliomaniac as he stood in this treasure-house of books. All

day long they examined the treasures of the shelves, and ate their lunch as hurriedly as possible, eager to get back to the feast of intellect. Sir Gilbert found that he had a truly congenial spirit in the Professor, and expounded his favourite theories and rode his favourite hobbies until the twilight began to close in. All this time the astute Professor had been thinking of the 'Giraldus,' but did not ask where it was, fearing lest a too great eagerness on his part might cause suspicion in the jealous breast of the bookworm. He led the conversation round to the request which the baronet had made to him when he came into the room.

'You were saying something about a point you wanted elucidated, when I came in, Sir Gilbert,' he said, looking at him keenly.

'Yes, yes!' replied Sir Gilbert; 'it is in regard to the discovery of the philosopher's stone. Can you tell me any notable work on the subject?'

'I think you will find what you want in "Giraldus,"' said the Professor, whose pulse was beating quickly.

'But he is an obscure chemist,' objected Sir Gilbert.

'You find pearls in oysters,' quoth the German calmly; 'and the obscure chemist gives the best description of the philosopher's stone I have met with.'

'I thought you had never read the "Giraldus?"' said Sir Gilbert sharply.

The Professor felt that he was on dangerous ground.

'Not the work itself,' he answered coolly; 'but other authors which I have studied give extracts, and, putting them together, I have arrived at the conclusion that the work of Giraldus's is the best on the subject.'

'Well, I had better bring you the book, and you can show me the part you refer to,' answered Sir Gilbert, and went off to find it.

The Professor sat down in the Baronet's chair by the writing-table, and waited with his heart beating rapidly. At last he had arrived at the consummation of his hope, and in another minute would know the name of the drug which was to be of such value to him. Presently the Baronet came back and laid on the table an old yellow book, the counterpart of that which lay in the Professor's study at Heidelberg. The Professor took it up and turned over the leaves carelessly, although the touch of every page caused a thrill to go through him.

'You had better get Von Helme too,' he said, looking at the Baronet. 'I think he will prove also useful to you.'

Sir Gilbert hurried away well pleased, while the Professor



took the 'Giraldus' to the window and turned to the tenth page. Then, counting four lines down, he ran his finger along until it stopped at the fifth word :

'Maiden's blood. . . .'

When Sir Gilbert came back with the book wanted, he found Brankel standing by the window turning over the leaves of the 'Giraldus.' In handing him Von Helme's work he glanced up in his face to see if it was the one required, but recoiled in a moment with a cry.

'Good God ! what ails you ?'

The cold light of the evening was striking fair on the face of the German, and the rest of his body was in the shadow. His face was livid, with great drops of perspiration standing on it, and with the jet-black eyebrows, wild hair, and thin, sneering mouth, he looked the incarnation of the arch-fiend—a modern Mephistopheles. When the Baronet spoke he turned to him with a cold smile, and the writhe of pain passing over his face vanished and left him with his usual countenance.

'I had a spasm of pain,' he explained, gently going back to the study table ; 'it is gone now.'

The Baronet looked at him doubtfully, and then suggested that some brandy should be brought.

'Nothing, thank you,' replied the Professor, holding the 'Giraldus' with one hand and waving the other. 'I am subject to these attacks. I am perfectly well now. See, here is the remark of Giraldus on the philosopher's stone.' And they were soon deep in the book.

The Professor refused to stay to dinner on the plea that he had an engagement, and hastened away almost immediately. When he got to his hotel he went to his bedroom, and, pulling out his diary, began to write rapidly.

*November 15.*—At last I have solved this problem, which has been my aim these many days. I have had the second volume of 'Giraldus' in my hands, and on turning to the page mentioned in the cryptogram I find that the mysterious drug is 'maiden's blood.' In order to bring out the highest powers of the elixir I must mingle with it the heart-blood of a pure maiden. It is a terrible ingredient, and will be difficult to obtain, but I shall not shrink, for I consider it my duty to bring this elixir to its highest state. But where am I to find the maiden from whom to obtain the blood ?

Murder is a crime generally punished by the gallows. Bah !

why do I bring these things into my thoughts? The killing of a person in the cause of science is no murder. If my own blood were necessary I should not hesitate a moment, but give it freely, in order to consummate this great discovery. Before we can wrest the secrets from the great mother, Nature, we must propitiate her with victims. How many human beings have been slain in a less noble cause than this? Was not the daughter of Agamemnon slain by her own father in order to satisfy the wrath of Artemis? and shall I shrink from offering up a woman on the altar of science? A thousand times no. The cause of science must be advanced even at the cost of human blood, and I, who am appointed by fate to give this secret of Nature to the world, shall not shrink from my task.

Everything is prepared, the altar, the priest, and the victim, for Miss Harkness will have the honour of contributing her heart's blood to this great discovery. I have made up my mind that she is to die in this cause; and what greater honour can I offer her? Do not the Hindoo maidens immolate themselves cheerfully under the death-dealing wheels of the chariot of their god, and shall an Englishwoman shrink from sacrificing herself in the cause of science? I cannot tell her my wish, for such is the lack of ambition in her soul that she would not comprehend the magnitude of the thing, and doubtless refuse. I must decoy her into my power some way, and kill her.

It is a terrible thing to do, no doubt, but in my case must be used the motto of the Jesuits: 'The end justifies the means.' Did I believe in the existence of a Supreme Being I would pray to him to direct me, but as I have no such belief I must kneel to thee, O Science, and entreat thine aid to bring round this sacrifice on thy shrine. The blood of this one maiden will be of more value to the world than that which thousands of human beings have shed on the fields of Marathon or Waterloo.

## CHAPTER VII.

### WOLF DEN.

Good gentlemen!

The house is stuff'd with ghosts, pray you be wary;  
For every footfall wakes a hundred fiends,  
Who have the power to do us devilries.

It was a queer, rambling old place, built of grey stone, which was almost hidden in dark-green ivy. The stones in some places were so eaten away and cracked by the lapse of years that it seemed to be held together by the clinging parasite. It was a

quaint, picturesque house, built in the Elizabethan style of architecture, with narrow, diamond-paned windows, huge stacks of chimneys twisted into all kinds of fantastic shapes, and little red-roofed turrets starting out of the walls at all sorts of odd corners, and clinging to the grey old stones like birds'-nests. Under the sloping eaves—where the swallows built regularly every summer—over the great oaken doors, beside the elaborately carved windows, were grotesque faces, carved out of stone into a fixed grin, peering everywhere, like the goblin inhabitants of the deserted mansion. Grass grew between the crevices of the broad stones of the balcony, thistles waved in the deserted courtyard, and there was a damp, green slime everywhere. Some of the shutters, torn off by the force of the wind, were lying half-buried in the bush-grass beneath, while others hung crazily on their broken hinges, and swung noisily to and fro with every breeze. It had formerly been a place of great magnificence, and the lofty ceilings of the state rooms were decorated with beautiful paintings. But the broad oaken stairs, down which had come so many generations, were now thick with dust, and the pale moon, looking through the painted windows, only saw dreary rooms filled with floating shadows. But it was not the dreary loneliness of the place that made it such a thing of horror to the simple folk around. There was said to be a curse on the place, for the last proprietor of it had hanged himself, after spending the remains of his fortune in a last banquet. In the great dining-hall a ragged piece of rope, suspended from a hook in the wall, still showed the place where he committed the deed. It was here, after that last terrible orgy was done—after he had exhausted all the wine of life and found that the lees were bitter indeed—that he came and launched himself into another world. His ghost was said to haunt the scene of his former follies, and wail for the past that could not be undone. But the lights which announced his presence were probably only the glimmer of the moon on the glittering windows, and the wail of the wind whistling through the deserted halls, his voice. But the rustics would have been indignant at such a solution, and firmly held to the belief that, whatever modern science might say to the contrary, there were ghosts, and that Wolfden was haunted by one. On the death of the last squire the estate had gone into Chancery, and the place to rack and ruin. No tenant could ever be found for it, even in this ghost-despising age, for the place was eerie, and a cloud hung over it. When the German Professor took it he was looked upon as a wonderfully brave man; and, indeed, it was whispered among the village gossips that he must have

some acquaintance with the black art itself before he could trust himself so fearlessly among the ghostly inmates of Wolfden. Superstition still has her votaries, even in this enlightened age, among those lonely hills, and the strange-looking foreigner gave rise to a good many queer surmises. The Professor did not occupy all the house, but only a small range of rooms on the right side. Those on the left were the state rooms, and he shut them up close, leaving them to their dust and loneliness. Immediately above the rooms on the right side was an octagon-shaped apartment, which the Professor turned into a laboratory for the prosecution of his chemical experiments. A light could be seen in this room far into the night, for the Professor preferred working at night instead of the day time. All day he was at the Hall, in the library with Sir Gilbert, hunting among the books, and helping the Baronet with his 'History of Chemistry.' Sir Gilbert was the only member at the Hall with whom the German was on friendly terms. Philippa always avoided him, and showed plainly that she did not relish his company, while Lord Dulchester did not conceal his dislike in the least—a dislike which the Professor cordially returned. The German kept a vigilant watch on Philippa, in order to seize any opportunity which might offer itself of getting her into his power, for he was firmly fixed in his hideous purpose of killing her in order to add the necessary ingredient to the elixir. Wherever Philippa went she would find those mesmeric eyes fixed steadily on her, like two evil planets blighting her with their malignant influence. Under this continual supervision she began to grow thin and pale. Wherever she went she seemed to feel the burning gaze of those eyes fixed on her, and would start nervously at every sound. Nature could not bear the strain, and at last Philippa saw that unless she removed herself from the influence of the Professor she would soon be very ill. To this end she took a sudden resolution, and unfolded it to Jack in this wise:

'Jack,' said she one evening, when they were alone in the drawing-room, and the Professor and Sir Gilbert were talking science over their wine, 'do you believe in the evil eye?'

Lord Dulchester, who was gazing idly into the fire, turned round in dismay.

'Good Heavens, Philippa, what put that idea into your head?'

'I believe the Professor has,' went on Philippa solemnly. 'Whenever I look at him I always find his eyes fixed on me.'

'Just give me leave, and I'll soon settle his eyes,' said Jack grimly.

'Don't be a fool, Jack,' was Miss Philippa's ungrateful retort; 'he is a friend of papa's.'

'He doesn't stay here,' replied Dulchester sulkily, giving his huge shoulders a shake.

'I don't see what that's got to do with it,' answered Philippa candidly; 'he is here every day. But look here, Jack,' she went on, 'I can't stand this much longer, I am sure I shall get ill.'

'You do look rather pale,' interjected Jack, looking at her anxiously.

'So I have made up my mind to go up to London and stay with Aunt Gertrude.'

'Oh!'

Lord Dulchester gave a shiver. He had reason to remember that high-browed, Roman-nosed matron, for she had hunted him through several seasons in the most determined manner, in order to secure him for one of her daughters, who were all equally high-browed and Roman-nosed.

'You need not make such faces, Jack,' said Philippa coolly, for Jack had confided to her the system of social persecution to which her cousins had subjected him; 'you need not come.'

'Oh, won't I though,' retorted Dulchester vivaciously. 'I am not afraid; I'm an engaged man now.'

'Jack,' said his lady-love solemnly, with a malicious twinkle in her eye, 'let me implore you not to let my beautiful cousins win your heart from me, for you know your engagement will be no obstacle; and oh, Lord Dulchester, they have brought the art of flirting to a very high state of perfection.'

'Let them try it on,' said Jack, laughing gaily at the idea; 'I am quite willing to risk it, Phil.'

And so it was arranged. Philippa wrote to her aunt and received an effusive answer, stating that she would only be too glad, and saying that they were going for the winter to the South of France; did dear Philippa mind? No, dear Philippa didn't; for she would have gone to the North Pole, if necessary, to escape from those terrible eyes of the Professor. So she began to make arrangements, and fixed an early day for her departure.

*Wolfden, November 22.*—I have been peculiarly unfortunate with regard to the last ingredient of the elixir. I am no nearer the accomplishment of my desire than before. Miss Harkness persistently avoids me, and I am unable to get her alone. That infernal lover of hers is always with her, and I suspect would have no hesitation in doing me a personal injury. He hates me, I see, for he does



not take the least pains to conceal it. This is unfortunate, for it adds to my difficulties in the accomplishment of my design. I have asked Miss Harkness over here, but she persistently refuses to come; and I have at times despaired of getting her at all. And now, to add to my difficulties in the matter, she has arranged to go to the South of France, where, as she told me, she will probably stay for a long time. It is an impossibility for me to prolong my stay in England beyond the six months, so if she goes away now there is every probability that I shall lose her. There is yet a week before she leaves, so I may think of some plan before then by which I can accomplish my purpose. The thought often comes across me that if I kill her I shall be liable to the law of England. The law has no sympathy with the sacred cause of science, and would hang me for the murder (as it would call it) as calmly and judiciously as if I were some common felon who had beaten his wife to death. It cannot be helped; if I wish to perfect this great discovery I see that there is no alternative but to become a victim to the law. But my discovery will live after me, and I shall be looked on as a glorious martyr to the cause of science. I will give this diary—in the event of my being hanged for the sacrifice on the altar of science of this girl—to some learned ‘savant’ in my own country, who will edit it, and the world shall see how gradually I was led to the crowning act of my life. I shall be honoured as a martyr; therefore I have no hesitation in committing the deed which is likely to bring me within the arm of the law. ‘The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church,’ and my death shall be the means of giving to the world an elixir by which they can foresee both past and present and future. They will be able to see far ahead, and avert from the world those calamities which have fallen on it hitherto owing to the darkness which has veiled the future. What are a few pangs of physical pain in comparison with the splendid future thus open to the world through my agency? My mind is made up—I am ready and willing to fall a martyr in the cause of science against the powers of ignorance, and over my grave shall be inscribed the one word so pregnant with meaning—‘Resurgam!’

. . . . .

One! strikes slowly with a sound like thunder from the grey old belfry of the church. Midnight—this is the hour during which the earth is thronged with spirits. They pour from the green graveyards, from the charnel-house; the murderer’s skeleton descends from its gibbet, and the rich man’s spirit comes from its vault. So the air is thick with them; their incorporeal forms

are thronging in myriad numbers thick as the leaves of Vallombrosa.

Wolfdon stands black and dense in front of the calm splendour of the moon; the stars shine on it with their myriad eyes, but they cannot lift the shadow from off it. And he who lies within—is he mingling with the airy spirits of the dead, or dreaming of the accomplishment of his hideous purpose? Is he mad? Is his potent elixir only the outcome of a confused brain? Or is he a glorious genius shaping the form of a great discovery? Is he mad? Was Hamlet?

How still the night; only the murmur of the river as it flows, broad-breasted and fair, towards the infinite sea. A few barges lie on the surface of the stream—black, shapeless masses, hanging, as in the centre of a hollow globe, between the star-spread sky above and its counterpart in the breast of the river. The distant cry of an owl comes from the belfry, an answer comes from another at Wolfdon, and then the bell again—one! two! Hark! the wind is rising; the hollow-voiced bell has woke it, and it rushes its wild and querulous voice through the deserted halls. Whew! how it whistled through the great dining-room, and shook the jagged fragment of rope to and fro as if in glee. The old Squire's spirit is abroad to-night. Whew! how it catches the crazy shutters and shakes them to and fro until one falls off with a shriek, and then the wind rushes away again, rejoicing in its work. Whirr! what a blast down the chimney—the laboratory—what armies of phials, what queer cabalistic apparatus! There are a few ashes in the furnace. How the fierce wind made them flare and blaze redly like the angry eye of the Cyclops. Away down the old oak stairs, where the moon, looking through the painted windows, casts a red stain on the dust. Whew! into the bedroom of the Professor. Blow the curtains aside, and let yon thin shaft of moonlight strike on his face. How calm, how passionless is the spirit indeed in the body, or is his discovery a great truth? How deadly pale, with the black eyebrows and the black hair wildly tossed about on the pillow. Look how his hand is clenched! A shade sweeps across his face. Is it the spirit returning to the body, or a cloud drifting across the face of the moon? Is he mad? Does that great brow only bind the fantastic humours of a madman's brain? Is he mad? Who can tell? Time alone will work out the solution of that problem. Leave him alone to his dreams and phantasies. Away! out to sea, where the great ships ride on the white waves. Whew! away! Whirr—whew! Look how the clouds drive across the midnight sky! Oh! this is

rare sport; hark! the white surges of the Atlantic cry aloud! Whew! and the wind sweeps away into the black pavilion of clouds which hangs over the boiling surges of the ocean.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### IN THE LABORATORY.

Whene'er a man  
Is near the pinnacle of his desire,  
'What ho!' cries Death, and lo! he tumbles down.

JUST outside the gates of Wolfden stood a large hawthorn, whose branches, bare of leaves, were shaking wildly in the keen November blasts. It was raining heavily, and the sky was overcast with heavy clouds, while there was not a speck of blue to be seen giving any promise of clearing up.

Under the hawthorn, trying to get some shelter from the driving rain, stood Lord Dulchester and his *fiancée*. They had come out for a short walk, and were now caught in the full fury of the storm just outside the gates of Wolfden.

Jack drew Philippa under the hawthorn, but they might as well have been in the open for all the protection that delusive shelter afforded them. They were a quarter of a mile away from the Hall; the storm gave no promise of clearing away, and the nearest place at which they could get shelter was Wolfden, which Philippa resolutely declined to enter.

'I can't go in while that horrible man is there,' she said in reply to Jack's persistent entreaties that she would seek shelter there.

'I like him as little as you do,' retorted Dulchester bluntly; 'but I'm not going to have you get your death of cold for anything of that sort. We have got no umbrella. Wolfden is the nearest shelter, and the storm won't clear away for some time, so the best thing we can do is to go in.'

Philippa cast a disconsolate look around. It was raining vigorously, and the road was full of little puddles of water. She had her furs on, but her feet were quite wet, so she at last consented to try the hospitality of the Professor.

'Beggars mustn't be choosers,' she said miserably. 'Lead on, Macduff.'

Macduff (otherwise Lord Dulchester) pushed open the gate, and, letting Philippa pass through, shut it with a bang. The house looked dreary and gloomy in the rain, but they had not



much time to inspect it. They hastened up the path, and soon found themselves at the huge oaken door. Jack applied the knocker vigorously, and in a few minutes the door was opened by the Professor himself. He expressed the greatest surprise at seeing them, and inwardly determined that he would accomplish his design at once, since the elements had put it into his power.

'You had better come upstairs to my laboratory,' he said, shaking Dulchester by the hand, with the civility that gentleman did not seem to relish at all; 'it is the only place I have a fire in.'

'Thanks, I should prefer to wait here,' said Philippa coldly, looking out through the door at the steady rain.

'Permit me to observe, Miss Harkness,' said the Professor blandly, 'that I am a little bit of a doctor, and you are very likely to catch cold standing here in your wet clothes.'

'You had better go, Phil,' struck in Jack, giving himself a shake like a huge water-dog; 'I'll come too.'

The Professor acquiesced in this arrangement with at least some show of pleasure, and led the way upstairs to his laboratory.

It was an octagon-shaped room, with a triple-arched, diamond-paned window, and a furnace nearly opposite. There were a multitude of instruments and drugs required for chemistry scattered about, and on a small table were writing materials.

Opposite the door which gave entrance from the body of the house was another smaller and massive-looking door, bound with iron; it was partly open, but nothing could be seen beyond.

The Professor led his unexpected visitors into this workshop of science, and, having apologised for the disorder it was in, put Philippa in a chair in front of the furnace. He removed a portion of the top, so that more heat could get at her, and then asked his visitors if they would take any wine. Both of them declined, so the Professor set his wits to work to get Dulchester out of the way.

Jack was rather taken with the queer apparatus about, and the quick-witted German, seeing this, began explaining various experiments to him. Philippa sat looking dreamily into the fire and drying her wet boots, while her lover and the Professor moved about. At last Dulchester found himself close to the iron-bound door.

'What have you in here, Professor?' he asked, pushing it slightly open with his hand.

The Professor's eyes flashed. Here was a chance of getting rid of Dulchester he had not reckoned upon.

‘Go and see,’ he said with a laugh. Jack, feeling curious, stepped in, upon which the Professor pulled the door to. It was a spring door and shut with a click, hearing which Philippa turned round.

‘Where is Lord Dulchester?’ she asked, rising from her chair in alarm.

‘In there,’ answered the Professor, with a harsh laugh of triumph, pointing to the door.

‘Hallo, Professor, let me out,’ called Jack, with a kick at the door.

The Professor paid no attention, but advanced towards Philippa.

‘Let him out, Professor,’ she asked with a calmness she was far from feeling, for she did not like the glare in his eyes. ‘I think we will go now; the storm has cleared away.’

The Professor did not answer, but pulling a drawer out of the table, produced from it a long steel knife, the edge of which he felt with a hideous smile. Philippa felt her heart leap, and would have fainted, but she knew that all her courage would be needed in this terrible situation.

‘Young lady,’ said the Professor, looking at her with a triumphant smile, and speaking slowly. ‘Some months ago I made a great discovery which requires one thing to perfect it. That is the blood of a pure and innocent maiden. I have chosen you as the person who is to assist at the consummation of this great secret of Nature. You will have had a short life but an eternal fame.’

Philippa’s heart turned sick within her as she saw the long blade of the knife, and the wild fire in his eyes.

‘It is an honour,’ he went on in the same monotonous tone, ‘to be an aid to the great cause of science. What is death? Only a pang, and then all is over. Are you prepared?’

The poor girl breathed a prayer to God, and then fixed her eyes steadily on the madman.

‘You have been my father’s guest,’ she said in a hard voice, which sounded unnatural to her own ears. ‘Will you stain your hands with the blood of his daughter?’

‘It is an honour,’ answered the madman with a ghastly smile, running his thumb along the edge of the knife. ‘Prepare.’

Philippa had retreated to the window as he advanced, and she looked round for some weapon of defence. On the window-sill by her side was a huge bottle filled with some chemical preparation. At an ordinary time she could not have lifted it, but at the present moment the terrible danger gave her strength, and, catching it up, she turned round on the German.

He was now standing immediately in front of the furnace, and she could see the fire blazing up behind him.

'Advance another step and I will throw this,' she cried fiercely, clenching her teeth.

'It is an honour,' he repeated with a vacant smile, advancing.

She closed her eyes in desperation and flung the bottle at him with all her strength. It struck the advancing madman on the shoulder, causing him to stagger against the furnace, and then fell fair into the burning heat of the fire with a crash. Immediately there was a terrible explosion, and Philippa saw a wall of fire rise up before her as she sank insensible on the floor.

Meanwhile Jack, who had guessed that there was something wrong, hammered at the door with unabated vigour, but finding that it resisted all his efforts, looked round about for some way of escape.

He was in a long, narrow room, and at the end a small window gave an indistinct light. Jack hurried towards this and dashed it open. He got outside on the ledge which ran round the house, and found himself about twenty feet from the ground. But the ivy which grew in profusion all over the walls offered a natural ladder. He did not hesitate a moment, but scrambled down at once. How he reached the ground he did not know, but as soon as he found himself on *terra firma* he rushed round to the front, in at the door which the Professor had left open, and up the stairs.

The door of the laboratory was closed. But that was no obstacle to the athlete putting his shoulder to it and bursting it open, and on entering he found the room full of smoke. He stumbled over a body lying on the floor, and on bending down saw it was that of the Professor, lying in a pool of blood.

With a cry he stepped over him, and found Philippa lying under the window insensible. He caught her in his arms, and, carrying her downstairs, called loudly for the servants.

On their appearance he sent them upstairs to see after the Professor, while he laid Philippa on a sofa in the sitting-room and sprinkled her face with water. She opened her eyes with a low moan, and, on seeing Jack's face bending over her, caught his arm with a convulsive sob.

'Oh, Jack,' she gasped, 'what has happened?'

'That's what I should like to know,' said Jack anxiously, as she sat up.

'The Professor wanted to kill me,' she said, looking at him

with a haggard face, 'and I flung some bottle at him. It fell into the fire, there was an explosion, and I knew no more.'

Jack did not say anything, but telling one of the servants to go for the police at Launceston, took her home.

Of course the affair caused a nine days' wonder. The back of the Professor's head was blown away, and death must have been instantaneous. The bottle evidently contained some dangerous drug, which exploded on touching the fire. He was buried in England, and news of his death was sent to his relatives in Germany.

Sir Gilbert was horrified at the event, and came to the conclusion, as everyone else did, that the German was mad. Philippa's system sustained a severe shock, and she was ill for a long time.

She is now Lady Dulchester, and her husband is devotedly attached to her.

The diary of the Professor fell into the hands of Sir Gilbert, and it was from it that Lady Dulchester learned the strange series of events which had so nearly cost her her life.

Jack is very proud of his wife's bravery, but she can never recall without a shudder that terrible hour when she discovered the Professor's secret.

NOTE BY DR. R. ANDREWS.—I was on a visit to Sir Gilbert Harkness, and found the diary of the late Professor Brankel in the library. I read it, and was deeply interested in the wonderful workings of a diseased brain which it afforded to me. Sir Gilbert had a phial of the elixir which the Professor claimed to have discovered, and on analysing it I found that the principal ingredient was opium. Without doubt this was the cause of his visions and hallucinations as described by him in his diary. Whether he did find the cryptogram which led to his discovery I do not know, but I think that the quantity of opium and other drugs which he took must have sent him mad.

From the earlier portions of his diary I am inclined to think that he must have had the germs of insanity in him, which developed under the evil influence of the drink which he called the elixir.

I obtained leave from Sir Gilbert to publish the portions of the diary contained in this story (which I translated from the German—of course, I mean I translated the diary only), and, from what was told me by Lady Dulchester and her husband, I joined the rest of the story together.

The opium vision in Chapter V. struck me as being peculiarly strange. It seems to embrace short and vivid pictures of what the dreamer saw, and must have been written by him immediately after he awoke in the morning. In the diary it was written hurriedly, and was so illegible that I could not make portions of it out.

The inner workings of a man's mind are always interesting, and this, coupled with the strange series of events linking it to the outer world, led me to publish this story. Of a certainty there is no truer saying than 'Truth is stranger than fiction.'

*(The End.)*

## A Ghostly Adventure on Exmoor.

WILLIAM HURSTWICK was the reverse of a romantic or sentimental young man, being hard-headed and endowed with a fair share of common-sense, which the buffetings he had received in some thirty years of a hard struggle against adverse circumstances had done their best to strengthen. No one could call him visionary or hysterical, or aught but the most prosaic of mortals, yet he always vouched for the truth of the following tale.

After some years of continuous hard work he thought he should like a holiday. He applied to his employer who, knowing the value of a good clerk, at once gave him six weeks' leave.

Then Hurstwick turned over in his mind whither his steps should lead him, and finally decided that he would go to beautiful Devon.

He had no one to consult save himself, as he stood alone in the world as far as relations were concerned, therefore his preparations were soon made and he was on his way to Devonshire.

In spite of his hard-headedness the beauty of the scenery appealed strongly to him, and he would lie for hours watching the sea in all its changeful moods, the white clouds scudding across the blue expanse of sky, the lovely valleys and tree-clothed combs that stretched away in an endless vista inland.

September was drawing to a close, and with it Hurstwick's holiday, when the following adventure befell him.

He was lodging at a small farm in the vicinity of Porlock Bay, where everything was of the most primitive description as regarded furniture and utensils, but where the food was plentiful and good. For the first time in his life he was introduced to "squab pie," Devonshire junket, clotted cream, and such like delicacies, indigenous to the county, and they were helped with no niggard hand by the portly, rosy-complexioned wife of the



farmer, who was accustomed to the enormous appetites of the farm hands which the pure bracing air induced.

He had made several excursions over Exmoor to various places, laughing at the admonitions of his hostess never to let dusk overtake him on the moor if he would wish to avoid unpleasant circumstances, such as meeting the ghostly white rabbit, or Lady Howard in her coach with its four skeleton horses, or the spectral hearse, the coal-black steeds of which emit sulphurous flames from their eyes and nostrils, as they sink deep into the ground if anyone is adventurous enough to approach at all near them.

What did he care for ghosts, skeleton or otherwise? And he was highly amused at the mere idea of a poor little white rabbit being able to harm anybody, though the landlady shook her head portentously at his scoffing.

It was a lovely morning when he set out, quite warm and balmy, and the sea shone with myriad ripples as it softly lapped the shore below.

Hurstwick was a good walker, and intended to visit on foot some of the most noted places on Exmoor.

He laughingly told the farmer's wife that he should be quite ready for the broiled fowl and mushrooms when he returned at eight o'clock, and almost the last words he heard from her were an injunction that he had better make his return an hour earlier at least, as it got dark so soon in September.

But Hurstwick paid little attention to her, and her warnings fell on heedless ears.

He walked on across the moor with its wild ridges and crests, enjoying the beauty of the scenery and breathing in the sweet scents of sea and heather with a feeling of exhilaration.

He saw the Valley of Rocks, the far-famed Watersmeet, the valley of the Lyn, and from thence made his way to Badgworthy, the haunt of the robber Doones, and Simonsbath, and looked down on the place which for so long had sheltered Sir Ensor Doone and his beautiful granddaughter Lorna, together with the lawless crew who stopped at nothing, not even pillage and murder.

It was with mingled feelings William Hurstwick looked at the few stones that are all that remain to show where the habitations were. In fancy he saw again John Ridd climbing

that perilous ascent to meet the young girl he loved so dearly, risking life and limb as of nothing worth when compared with a glance from Lorna's soft eyes, a word from her sweet lips. He peopled the defile again with the huge robbers who for so long held terrorizing sway over the surrounding neighbourhood, till at last the populace rose and destroyed the band. How peaceful it all looked now ; with the ferns waving their feathery leaves in the gentle breeze and the water murmuring as it glided along, it was hard to believe that deeds of bloodshed and violence had once marred the loveliness of the spot.

It was with a start the young man awoke to the fact that the day was beginning to fall, and that he was many miles away from the farm-house, which was his temporary abode, so throwing a final glance around, he turned to retrace his steps towards home.

He walked on briskly, but, fast as he walked, the shades of night fell faster still, and ere he had gone very far, the darkness was closing him in all round.

He walked a little quicker. In spite of himself, a feeling of apprehension was coming over him. It would not be pleasant to be lost on Exmoor, and obliged to spend the whole night there.

He plodded on manfully, he would *not* think of all the ghostly tales Mrs. Marlow had been regaling him with, but in spite of this resolve, he found himself speculating as to whether Lady Howard would offer him a seat in her phantom-coach, or whether the demon horses of the spectral hearse might not engulf him with them in the morass, should he chance to meet with either.

"Pleasant," muttered the young man to himself, as he took out a handkerchief and mopped his brow, for the quick walking had made him warm. "'Pon my soul, it looks as though I should have to spend the night on Exmoor, for I can hardly see now, and in half-an-hour I shall not be able to distinguish my nose in front of my face. How on earth am I to find my way then ?"

Hurstwick was right ; in less than the half-hour, the conviction forced itself upon him that he did not know in which way he was going. It might be backwards, or forwards, or round and round, for anything he knew to the contrary.



William Hurstwick was by no means a coward ; but he may be pardoned if he felt a momentary thrill of apprehension, as he acknowledged this to himself.

The darkness by which he was surrounded was so dense that it could almost be felt.

There was an ominous stillness in the air that seemed to forbode evil.

The cry of a night-bird, coming across the silence, smote weirdly on his ear.

In spite of himself, his heart beat faster as he threw himself down on the grass to rest a little, and collect his thoughts.

What should he do ? It was not a pleasant idea to remain alone in this vast solitude, so dreary, and peopled only with the ghosts his imagination conjured up. There was not a single human being near him for miles, for aught he knew ; and even should he shout for help, he might only bring down upon him some bad characters who might rob him of what little he possessed.

On the other hand, to go forward, in that intense blackness had its dangers ; he might fall into some ravine or pit before he was aware of its proximity, and lie there maimed and bleeding for days before death would put an end to his sufferings, for it was unlikely he would be found there, or he might be engulfed in the treacherous bogs which he had been told existed on various parts of Exmoor.

Truly his predicament was not a pleasant one. He did not know how long he had sat there, when an ominous rumbling sound struck on his senses, and caused him to spring to his feet in fresh anxiety.

Thunder. To be caught in a storm would be the acme of all that was disagreeable ; he must seek some place of shelter.

As he turned his eyes around, endeavouring to penetrate the darkness, a sudden exclamation of relief escaped from his lips. There was a light glimmering at a short distance. It must be from some cottage, help would not be far off.

Wonderfully relieved in mind, Hurstwick started in the direction of the light, while the distant mutterings of thunder grew louder, urging him to hasten, if he would reach shelter ere the storm broke upon him.

He went quickly, occasionally stumbling over tussocks of

grass or boulders that he was unable to see ; and still as he went the light seemed to recede before him, he could get no nearer to it.

" Whew ! " he exclaimed at last, when he had barked his shins for the sixth time—" I believe the confounded thing must be a will-o'-th'-wisp. It may lead me into a bog."

At that very moment it disappeared, and Hurstwick, making a step forward, stumbled—and, before he could recover himself, was precipitated some distance down a declivity.

Picking himself up and finding he was not much hurt, he proceeded to feel his way about. " Steps—I declare," was his comment. " I must see—no feel—where they lead to."

Carefully feeling his way, he descended, and at that instant a brilliant flash of lightning momentarily illuminated the scene and showed him that the steps led down to a door.

On pushing this, it yielded to his touch, and he entered what, as far as he could make out, seemed to be a small chapel.

Lighting a wax vesta, he saw that his surmise was correct ; and making his way to a pew, he sat down—not sorry to have reached a refuge—for now the thunder roared, the lightning flashed, and the rain came down in torrents.

He was somewhat fatigued for he had been walking a good many hours, and he had not been long in this haven of refuge ere he dropped off to sleep, in spite of the noise made by the warring elements outside.

Suddenly he started up wide-awake.

A feeling that he was no longer alone came over him, and his heart beat high with a strange emotion that was not altogether fear.

It was still dark, yet he could hear the muffled tread of feet that seemed to be descending the stone steps by which he himself had entered the underground chapel. Then he heard the door swing back, and a shudder he could not repress came over him.

Who were these who were coming in ? Would they prove to be friends or foes ? Might he not have chanced upon the secret hiding-place of some band of robbers, who would resent his intrusion and silence any fear of his betraying them by taking his life ? Too well he knew that if such were the case his chance would be small ; all traces of the crime could be easily hidden and none would know his fate.

Eagerly he strained his eyes to discover who it was that was entering the chapel, but the darkness shrouded them so that he could not see.

He dared not stir, he seemed chained to the spot, rooted there by some intangible horror, which was intensified by a terrific peal of thunder that broke as it seemed just overhead.

Almost immediately following a brilliant gleam of lightning shone into the chapel, revealing a strange scene to the astonished gaze of the solitary spectator.

The peculiar brilliance did not die away as the former flashes had ; it remained, shedding a weird light over everything, and showing Hurstwick a group of persons collected near the altar. This latter was draped in black, and upon it a skull and cross-bones rested. Just inside the rails was a priest with shaven crown, and kneeling in front of him were a young man and a girl, as if about to be joined in the bonds of holy matrimony.

The girl was young and very lovely ; but Hurstwick thought he had never seen such an awful look on any human being's face ; it was like the anguish of a lost soul. Her dress was of a bygone period, but rich and costly, though it seemed rumpled and mud-stained as though the wearer had had no time for changing it after a journey.

The man by her side was young and handsome, apparently a fitting mate for the beautiful girl. His clothes too had an old-fashioned air. There was a stern, set expression on his face, except when he turned it towards *her*, then his eyes took a mournful, softening look ; but what struck Hurstwick as being very extraordinary was that he was heavily fettered, both wrists and ankles having gyves upon them.

A little behind them stood an elderly man with a forbidding countenance, and three or four retainers completed the group.

No one took the slightest notice of Hurstwick, where he sat a more than interested spectator of the strange scene.

And now the priest began what was evidently the marriage-service, though the young man could not hear what was said, a low murmur being all that reached his ears in the intervals of the thunder that pealed outside.

It was ended, and the bridegroom clasped his bride and held her close to his breast with his fettered hands as though he would never let her go.

Then Hurstwick saw the elderly man advance as if to take the shrinking girl from her resting-place ; but though he heard no sound he could see that she was begging and imploring some mercy from her guardian or father, whichever he might be, and clinging all the tighter to her lover, when, his patience exhausted, the elderly man tried to tear her from his clasp.

Failing in this he made a sign to the other men, two of whom advanced and wrenched her with no gentle hands from her husband, who, heavily fettered, was powerless to rescue his bride.

Then Hurstwick saw something which made the blood in his veins run cold with horror. A third man stealthily approached the bridegroom from behind, a long, murderous-looking knife in his hand.

The young man tried to call out, to warn the intended victim of this treachery, but his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth and he found himself powerless to move or speak. Vainly he struggled with the lethargy which overpowered him, he could not avert the doom which was dealt.

The girl saw her lover struck and the red blood spurt from the wound over the murderer's hand. By a superhuman effort freeing herself from her captors, she rushed to the altar, where her husband yet stood, though swaying backwards and forwards from faintness, and flung herself before the knife which was descending for the second time, so that it was sheathed in her breast.

As she fell, with her dying eyes still looking love unutterable into those of her sinking bridegroom, the elderly man rushed forward, horror and remorse depicted on his face as he saw the life-blood welling from her heart, and a cry, weird and terrible, that pierced above the fury of the storm, broke from his lips and rang through the vaulted chapel, while the priest looked on at all three with fierce, un pitying gaze, that told of an evil soul beneath his sacred robe.

And now Hurstwick saw what had escaped his notice before ; this was a yawning grave, into which the priest motioned the men to throw the yet warm bodies of those whom he had joined in wedlock so short a time before.

"Monster, forbear," shrieked Hurstwick, as he saw the corpse of the fair girl about to be thrown into that yawning chasm.

"Murderer, surely your crime will cry to Heaven for vengeance," for he seemed to know it was owing to the priest's agency that those hapless lovers had been done to death in so terrible a fashion.

The words had hardly left his lips when the chapel seemed to rock to its foundations, the light suddenly went out, leaving only a ghastly darkness; a hissing sound rent the air as though a thunderbolt had passed; and Hurstwick, thrown violently to the ground, lost his senses and knew no more.

\* \* \* \* \*

In vain his friends tell him that his night's exposure to the fury of the elements made him light-headed and fancy all that he saw.

Hurstwick maintains they were real ghosts, and that, centuries before, some ghastly tragedy must have been enacted on that very spot, though the cause and meaning of it could only be left to conjecture; but he is certain a page of some noble family's history was revealed to him that never-to-be-forgotten night; and he is yet in hopes of discovering the buried chapel, though up to the present he has not been able to discover its whereabouts.

## The Death Dance.

BY JOSEPHINE ERROL.

### CHAPTER I.

" I know a valley where the violets hide,  
A little pathway, and a green arcade,  
A rustic bridge, and many a ruder stile,  
A dusty roadway, lost among the hills,  
That skirt the scene for many an azure mile."

IT was April—a soft, tender April ; all things were budding and gave promise of a luxuriance of bloom and blossom by and by, though under the trees last year's leaves were lying, crisp and brown, and beneath the oaks the acorns of a bygone Autumn were thickly strewn. The pretty white flowers of the anemone were already open, and the daffodils, "that come before the swallows dare," showed their golden bravery, while the primroses dotted the turf with their starry petals, and the budding lilacs sent forth a perfume that mingled pleasantly with all the other sweet spring scents. In the lilac bush a thrush was singing clear and loud, in the tall beeches the rooks were busy building, and the starlings, perched on any elevated branch, twisted their glossy necks and enjoyed the sunshine. Over meadow and mountain and vale shone the sun, lighting up the landscape with a golden glamour and glittering on the blue sea in a million diamond sparkles as it fretted and foamed at the base of the great rugged cliffs, to which the daisy-pied meadows sloped down. On the brow of the cliff stood a young man beside a bay horse, on which sat a girl. A very, very pretty girl, as one glance sufficed to tell, for her eyes were as blue as the waves of the Atlantic that dashed around the rocks some two hundred feet below, and her brown hair looked as though it had caught a sunbeam and kept it captive in its bright meshes, while her skin was fair and delicate as the petals of a blush rose. She was looking rather anxiously, still very tenderly, at her companion, whose dark face bore an unmistakable scowl, which rather marred its good looks.



"You see I can't help it, Humfrey," she was saying gently, almost apologetically.

"I don't know. I suppose you could help it if you chose."

"No, really I cannot."

"The attractions of the London season are too much for you," he said, half sullenly.

"Don't think that, *please*," she implored. "I don't care in the least for the London season. Why, Humfrey, you must surely know that."

"No, I don't," he returned obstinately. "All women like admiration and gaiety. Why should you be an exception, Ethel?"

"I think you should know why, dear," she answered quietly, "and I have already spent two seasons in Town and did not much enjoy them."

"Oh, really?" he ejaculated, with sarcasm.

"Really."

"Humfrey," she went on a moment later, very earnestly, "surely you must know that I would a thousand times rather stay here in beautiful Cornwall than go back to London; now, when all the flowers and trees are budding, and the skies blue, and the winds warm, and the summer coming."

"Then if you would rather stay, Ethel," he said, coldly, "why don't you do so?"

"Because I cannot."

"You can if you wish."

"Mrs. Morris leaves in two days, I must go with her."

"There is no necessity. I have told you I will telegraph to my sister Jean; she will come to Tremadoc, and then you can come and stay there too."

"My dearest Humfrey, I wish I could stay at Tremadoc. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to pass some weeks in your dear old home, but—" and she laid her little gauntleted hand on his shoulder—"it would not do."

"Rubbish!" he ejaculated angrily, displacing her hand with an impatient movement. "How worldly wise you are for a girl of eighteen. If you really loved me you would not stop to think what would or would not do, what that beast Mrs. Grundy would say."

"Dear, I am obliged to," she told him gently.

"Nonsense; if you loved me you would come to Tremadoc and stay there."

"I do love you, Humfrey, very, very dearly. Still, think—Jean is unmarried, and only a few years older than myself—hardly a fitting chaperon; and then, Humfrey," attentively examining the gold handle of her whip, "my position, in other respects, is equivocal. I—I—am not—actually engaged to you."

"No, Ethel," rejoined the young man magnanimously, turning his dark eloquent eyes on her. "I think it better not to fetter you, until I have my uncle's permission to make you my wife—until I know that he will not object to our union."

"Of course, dear," she agreed with a little sigh.

"So much depends upon his favour. I have nothing of my own, absolutely nothing; and of course he will not leave me Tremadoc if I displease him in any way."

"No."

"Deeply as I love you, I would not ask you to share poverty and a life of troubles and difficulties with me. I am sure my uncle will welcome you warmly when he does see you," he added brightly.

"I hope so," she responded doubtfully.

"Why should he not?" questioned her lover imperiously.

"I am poor."

"I shall have enough for both," he told her gleefully.

"He may expect you to marry an heiress or one of the nobility."

"Not likely. Uncle Dick is a bit of a Radical. Much more likely to welcome you, a doctor's daughter."

"I trust so," she said, with another little sigh, while her sweet winsome face wore a sad look, that spread like a shadow over her pretty features.

"You are given to taking a gloomy view of things," he told her lightly, his eyes roaming over the glancing sun-gemmed waters of the Atlantic.

"It is my nature. One cannot help one's nature," she smiled.

"Only you are absolutely morbid, Ethel, sometimes."

"Perhaps. I think I am more superstitious than anything else."



"You certainly are superstitious, but that is due to that old Irish nurse you have often told me about."

"Yes, partly, and to a natural inclination that way."

"I shall cure you of all that when you are my wife."

"If I am ever your wife, Humfrey," with a ring of exquisite pathos in her soft tones, and a deeper shade of melancholy in her beautiful eyes.

"Of course you will be my wife," he said confidently. "Uncle will be all right, and there is nothing else to stand in the way."

"It seems not, and yet—and yet I fear that the happiness of being your wife will never be mine."

"Nonsense, Ethel; that is one of your queer fancies. If you have any fear of losing me, why don't you let me wire to Jean and come to Tremadoc, and let us always be together till our wedding day? Then nothing can part us save death."

"Don't tempt me, Humfrey," she said pitifully. "Much as I long to go to the house of which you are virtually master, it would not be right to do so. It would prejudice your uncle against me if he found me staying there with only your sister as chaperon."

"I don't think so."

"I do. Won't you come to Town, Humfrey? That would be a much better arrangement," with such an eager, yearning look in the blue eyes.

"I can't. My uncle may arrive at any moment during the next two months, and woe betide me if I am not here to welcome him. He is as eccentric as erratic; never knows for two days together what he will do, and though at the present time I *believe* he is in a sailing vessel coming from Jamaica, I am not *certain* on that point. Heaven only knows where he actually is, I don't; but at any rate my post is here until he arrives, and even then I may not be at liberty to run up to Town, and I can't take a surreptitious trip when the journey up and down will take me close on four-and-twenty hours. Much better for you to stay here and make things sure."

"I could not stay at Tremadoc, under existing circumstances," she replied firmly, though sorrowfully, as she turned her horse's head inland, and let her eyes wander over the range of hills that bounded the horizon; "I would sooner lose you than do *that*, Humfrey."

"Well, perhaps you will lose me," he exclaimed angrily, "since you value my love so lightly."

"I value it more than anything else in the world," she said quickly. "Only I must go back with Mrs. Morris. It is to her kindness I owe this visit, and the joy of having met you. I could not act badly towards her, and besides—my mother expects me on Thursday."

"Then there is nothing more to be said on the subject," he said sullenly, as he commenced walking away from the cliff, the bay following her master, unchecked by her rider, whose heart was too sore and heavy for words.

---

## CHAPTER II.

"Love not, love not ; the thing you love may change,  
The rosy lips may cease to smile on you,  
The kindly-beaming eye grow cold and strange,  
The heart still warmly beat, yet not be true.  
Love not, love not."

ETHEL DURRANT was the only child of a doctor's widow. After her father's death they had no settled place of residence, and their income being small, they had gladly accepted the invitations freely given by richer friends, who were glad to help two such sweet women as Katherine Durrant and her fair young daughter.

Amongst the kindest of their friends they numbered Mrs. Morris, a wealthy widow, who had been a school-fellow of Katharine's, and having no children of her own, was more than willing to help her old friend's child to such luxuries and pleasures as her ample income afforded.

In the early part of the year, hearing Ethel say that she had never been in Cornwall, and that she longed to see "King Arthur's Land," she asked the girl to accompany her to one of her many country houses, this particular one being situated beyond Penzance, near the Land's End, in that sun-blessed, charming part of Cornwall which lies opposite the Scilly Isles, and being near the Gulf Stream, enjoys a delightfully mild climate. Ethel accepted the invitation joyfully, for her mother had been asked by an eccentric old uncle to accompany him to France, so she felt at liberty to go with Mrs. Morris, as she had not been included in the French invitation.

She was not disappointed when she arrived in that distant county after a long night journey of some ten hours. It seemed to her a sort of Paradise, and though it was then early in February, there was not a trace of snow to be seen on the hills. All was green and fair, and smiling, as in Spring in less favoured parts. Mrs. Morris's house stood on the sunniest slope of an undulating hill, facing the Atlantic, and through the vista of trees and shrubs glimpses of the blue limpid waves were caught, and inland of the great grey rugged hills far away in the dim distance. The bay of Tremadoc resembled an azure lake, so shut in was it by the giant headlands that stretched away on either hand, one beyond the other, in a long succession, until the last was lost in that distant line where sea and sky merged into one blue mass. Green woods and sloping hills framed the bay, and here and there a great cliff of serpentine marble reared its crest proudly, as though vain of its many-coloured face, and below was the glittering silver sand, each grain of which flashed and sparkled in the sunlight like precious metal, over which the crystal, clear waves lapped and murmured as they rolled backwards and forwards in their monotonous and ceaseless movement, leaving on the silvery strand some of the lovely treasures from their limpid depths, strange growths of the deep sea, many-coloured plants and weeds, quaintly-formed shells, and living denizens of the ocean, while over all arched the clear soft-hued sky, and around was that clear, balmy, delicious atmosphere peculiar to Cornwall.

To Ethel it proved an enchanted land. She was constantly finding out some new beauty in it, some quaint, old-world, out-of-the-way thing. First it was the narrow pack-horse paths, which existed hundreds of years ago, before roads were made or wheeled vehicles thought of in this remote district; then the open fire-places, where the peasant women burnt turf on the flagged hearth, and baked their bread in the red-hot sods; then she was interested in the old ramshackle coaches that ran from St. Just and other out-lying places to Penzance, and looked as though they had seen their prime a hundred years and more ago, when gentlemen of the road, in laced coats and three-cornered hats, were wont to call upon the occupants to "stand and deliver"; and the pilchard fishery, and the quaint donkey-carts used by the country-folk, and the mines that were tunnelled far down in the bowels of the earth, underneath the sea, where overhead the

Atlantic rollers thundered and broke. But above all she loved the weird strange tales, and legends and romances which were rife in that end of the county. Not an old gaffer or gammer she met with in the quaint gabled or thatched cots but had some eerie tale to tell of spirit, witch, hobgoblin, or fairy. To these simple superstitious folk even the great masses of marble that lay about in the fields were instinct with curious attributes, and according to them, at certain times of the year, threw off their stony semblance and became living, breathing men and women for a brief spell.

All these stories Ethel listened to with great interest. The unseen had always held an immense attraction for her, and she drank in eagerly all the tales of occult doings that the good folk were ready to ply her with, and read all the ghost stories that Mrs. Morris's library contained, until that lady became anxious on her account, thought she was reading too much unwholesome literature, and cast about her for some healthy amusement for the girl, whose curious taste for spirit lore she was well acquainted with and deplored. Her neighbours were few and far between, the nearest gentleman's residence was Tremadoc, a splendid old mansion, belonging to Hendrik Polcarrow, an eccentric old bachelor, who was given to wandering in remote corners of the globe, leaving his nephew, Humfrey, to look after the ancient house and the family interest, which he did not do particularly well, being a young fellow of five or six-and-twenty, with a self-loving, easy-going, fickle temperament, that attracted at first and repelled afterwards. Still, though young Humfrey Polcarrow was not a particular favourite with his few neighbours, they liked him better than old Hendrik, whose eccentricities, and domineering, selfish temperament, made him generally disliked.

For want of anyone better, in an evil hour Mrs. Morris asked Humfrey Polcarrow to her house, and he, never being loth to amuse himself, came and straightway fell headlong in love with Ethel after his usual fashion where a pretty face was concerned. The dawn of love was more gradual on her side, and of a more lasting description. The young people saw a great deal of each other, and their affection had plenty of time and opportunity to mature—which it did. At any rate, on his side in a kind of mushroom fashion. They met nearly every day, walked together, sang together, played tennis together, rowed over the

blue Atlantic together, and Mrs. Morris having no horses, Humfrey put some of his uncle's at Miss Durrant's disposal, and many delightful rides they enjoyed in each other's society.

Humfrey made violent love, as men of his shallow temperament generally do, and he besought the girl to marry him if—and this was a very big “if” indeed—his uncle approved of the marriage and gave his consent.

Ethel agreed unconditionally to these terms. She was too much in love to object; only when her imperious selfish lover wished her to remain in Cornwall after her friend, and spend some weeks in his house, chaperoned only by his sister, she firmly yet gently declined to place herself in such an equivocal position, and drew down on her devoted head the young man's wrath.

He did not wish to part with his last new plaything. New faces were not so easy to get there at the Land's End. If he wanted novelty, style and fashion he had to make a pilgrimage to Plymouth, no nearer could he get what he desired, and Ethel was all that he desired, for the time being at any rate. So, knowing that she simply adored him, that she was completely bound up in him, he tyrannised over her and was a trifle *difficile* as a lover. She, however, saw no fault in him; to her he was all that is good, true, noble, and she was dazzled by his fascinating manners and dark, handsome Velasquez-like face, and did not seek to look below the surface and see what this attractive exterior hid. Had she done so, she might have saved herself much sorrow,

Mrs. Morris was not an observant woman, and it did not strike her that the young man was making love to her pretty guest, until the day before they were to return to Town.

“Ethel, my dear,” she said, with suddenly awakened fear and concern, “has Humfrey Polcarrow been making love to you?”

“Yes, Mrs. Morris,” replied the girl truthfully.

“What! has he asked you to marry him?”

“Yes. If his uncle consents to it, I am to become his wife.”

“Ah! *If his uncle consents!* My dear child, don't reckon upon that; don't let your affections become too deeply engaged. Hendrik Polcarrow is a strange man, and by no means a nice or amiable one. He will probably choose a bride himself for his



nephew and heir ; and, believe me, she will not be a girl like yourself, without money or rank."

"Oh, Mrs. Morris," gasped Ethel, "don't say that. I couldn't live without him now, indeed—indeed I couldn't, I love him so."

"My poor child," said the elder woman in a tone of deep commiseration and infinite pity ; "is it as bad as that ? Has it become so serious with you ? Can you not root out and cast aside this love which may prove so fatal to you ?"

"No, no. It would be impossible to cast it aside now. It is part of my life, more than life. I should not care to live if he ceased to love me."

"Then we must hope for the best," said Mrs. Morris, soothingly, looking at the girl's white, piteous face, and wistful blue eyes. "Perhaps Hendrik Polcarrow may approve his nephew's choice."

"Oh ! I hope so. I do so humbly pray he may," cried Ethel, clasping her slender hands together.

"May your prayers be answered favourably," sighed her hostess, refraining from giving utterance to the dark fears and forebodings that oppressed her.

That night Humfrey came to say adieu to Ethel, and spend some hours with her. He seemed to have got over his annoyance at her refusal to stay at Tremadoc, and was most tender and loverlike, appearing to wish to leave a pleasant remembrance of himself in the girl's mind.

"You won't forget me, Humfrey, dearest," she whispered as she stood beside him on the steps, as he was about to depart on his homeward way.

"No ; I shall never forget you, darling," he responded fervently, slipping his arm round her waist and drawing her close to him. "I shall long for the time to come when I can see you again, when we need never part any more, when you will be my wife," and drawing her arms about his throat, he kissed his goodbye a hundred times on her sweet, willing lips, ere he turned away, and strode through the moonlight to Tremadoc.

## CHAPTER III.

" On either side of the gate,  
Looking out o'er the land,  
The two tall poplars stand ;  
Silent they watch and wait :  
A red rose grows by the fastened door,  
And blooms for those who will come no more  
Up the pathway strait.

Who cometh hushed and late  
Here in the dusk ? For whom  
Do the blood-red roses bloom  
And the faithful poplars wait ?  
What is it steals through the crumbling gate,  
With soundless feet on the pathway strait,  
In the twilight gloom ? "

ETHEL was very silent during the journey to London. To her it was a wearisome, sad thing, for every mile the train travelled took her further from Humfrey. The one she loved better than anything else on earth, in whom her being was bound up, and she felt strangely depressed and sad ; a foreboding, which she could not shake off, was on her, that she would never see Humfrey's handsome face again never listen to the winning tones of his musical voice. Mrs. Morris rallied her gaily, and tried to rouse her from the gloom that enveloped her, but she failed in the attempt, and her melancholy increased as they neared London.

Mrs. Durrant, who had come to Paddington to meet her daughter, noticed something was wrong, and before long she discovered the cause of Ethel's sorrow, and had the whole story of her love affair poured into her ready ears. She did her best to cheer her child ; but a hint from Mrs. Morris had warned her not to buoy the girl up with false hopes, hopes that might never be realised. However, next day her sorrow turned to joy for she received a long letter from Humfrey, full of endearments and tenderness, and her spirits rose accordingly. She continued to receive tender epistles for about six weeks, then they suddenly stopped ; and then, after a complete silence of three weeks, she received in answer to an agonised appeal for tidings

of him, from herself, a curt, cold letter, that briefly informed her his uncle had returned from the West Indies, and had brought with him the orphaned daughter of an old friend, whom he intended for his (Humfrey's) bride, and as he was entirely dependent on his uncle, he was unable to refuse to comply with his commands, so that the quasi engagement existing between him and Miss Durrant must come to an end, as Mr. Polcarrow would never consent to their union. Ethel read this cruel letter through three times before she clearly grasped its dreadful meaning, and when she did, when it came home to her what the loss meant, that she must give up Humfrey, her idolised, beloved Humfrey, that he was going to become another woman's husband, she threw up her arms exclaiming: "Love, oh, my love, I cannot live without you!" and fell senseless on the floor.

Mrs. Durrant found her daughter in an insensible condition some time after, and her indignation knew no bounds when she read the heartless letter that withered her child's happy hopes, banished her dream of love and happiness for ever; and though she said little to the suffering girl, she spoke openly and angrily to Mrs. Morris, and together they concocted a scathing letter which they sent to Humfrey. But whether it ever reached him, or whether, if it did, it pierced his armour of selfishness and self-complaisancy they never knew, for they never saw him again, and they were too troubled about Ethel to bother themselves much about him. From the day she received that fatal letter she seemed heartbroken and indifferent to almost everything, plunged in deep melancholy. These fits of melancholy alternated now and then with wildly mirthful ones, in which she seemed reckless and careless, and indifferent to what happened to her, or what people thought of her. Her health failed rapidly. The orbit of the eye hollowed, a hectic flush rose to her cheek, the outline of her face sharpened, and it was evident that she was in a serious way. Mrs. Morris, who reproached herself bitterly for having introduced Humfrey Polcarrow to Ethel, could not do enough for her. She took her to the opera frequently, to the theatres, to races, balls, picnics, concerts, any place where she thought the girl would be amused. But Ethel never lost her listless, melancholy manner, never seemed to enjoy anything. She



would sit still staring at nothing, a vacant expression in the soft, lovely blue eyes, oblivious to all her immediate surroundings, living over again those golden Spring days, when Humfrey had held her hand in a tender clasp, and looked love unutterable into her eyes. Mrs. Durrant was distracted at her child's apathy and misery, and she caught eagerly at Mrs. Morris's offer of a house on her Kentish estate, which had been lying idle for many years, and which the widow said was quite at her friend's disposal if she liked to have it for any length of time.

Mrs. Morris was going to Cull Lodge, and the old place she offered her friend was about two miles from the Lodge, so that she looked forward to seeing a good deal of them.

Mrs. Durrant lost no time in leaving London, and, as Thornhill House was furnished, everything was ready for them, and an old man and his wife, retainers of Mrs. Morris, were to attend on them, and save them the expense of a servant.

The house was not very large, and was quaint and old-fashioned to a degree. All the rooms were panelled shoulder-high with oak, and had queer ledges over the doors and wide fireplaces and window seats, and low ceilings, and there were dim twilight passages, that were suggestive of lurking ghosts and sliding panels, and *ruelles*, and closets in out-of-the-way and unexpected corners, and two tall spectral poplars flanked the gate on either side, and a huge rosebush, untrained and wildly luxuriant, scrambled and climbed over the porch and around the windows, and crept up to the pointed roof and curious chimneys, and over all, hung that mysterious air that says, "the house is haunted."

Mrs. Durrant did not notice this air of mystery. She was too much taken up with her child's ill-health, but to Ethel, the old place was a source of delight, and at first she rallied, and seemed likely to get better. She took an interest in the eerie nooks and corners, and ere long had made old Mat, the gardener and factotum at Thornhill House, tell her the whole story of how a wicked Squire Thornhill, in the middle of the last century, had married a beautiful young girl, who was forced, shrinking and reluctant, into his arms by cruel parents, and who found life, as his wife, so insupportable, seeing that she loved another man, that she taunted him, and exasperated him until, in a fit of rage, he killed his fair young wife.

"Leastways, miss," concluded Mat solemnly, "it ar allus been supposed as how he killed her—'cos she was found lyin' in her bed with a grievous wound in her buzzom, and black marks, like finger-marks, round her throat."

"And was the Squire hanged?" enquired Ethel, her wistful eyes fixed on the old man's face intently.

"Lor' bless you, no missie. It cud niver be brought home to un. Nobody seed un do it, and 'e swore 'e didn't do it, and there it was, don't yer know. Onny my grandfeyther, as was gardener to un,' told me long ago, when I was a boy, that Squire Thornhill, arter his wife's murder, gotten a queer trick o' lookin' over his shoulder, sudden-like, as though un expected to see somethin' 'e wudn't like, and 'e used to start and turn pale as a corpse, all for nothink other folk said, onny there was no knowin' what 'e saw."

"Of course not," agreed Ethel, watching a dim shadow flitting eerily amongst the trees.

"Onny ways, 'e tuk te drink, an' drank hisself te death 'n less nor two year arter his wife's murder. An' they do say, missie," added the old man in an awed whisper, "that he walks now o' nights, and that when onny one's tired o' their loife, an' weary, that e'll cum an' kill 'em, and release 'em from their sufferin', ef they ax him te."

"Ah!" was all Ethel said, as she gazed past the old man, at something behind him, and the look in her dilated eyes was so queer, that Mat did not care to turn round and see *what* had attracted her attention, but crept off to his own quarters timorously.

The old man's words sank deep into Ethel's superstitious mind. She believed in the visitation of occult beings, of visitants from another world, and while her mother and Mrs. Morris were busy getting up a little dance, which was to be a house warming for the Durrants, she brooded over old Mat's words and divided her thoughts about equally between Humfrey and Squire Thornhill.

At last the evening of the dance arrived. It was an August night, the moon was up, round, bright, resplendent. The windows were thrown wide, and the guests enjoyed the prospect of the pretty moonlit landscape. There were not many, about twenty people all told, and they chatted and laughed gaily until

some one sat down and played a valse, and then all commenced dancing. That is, all but Mrs. Morris and Mrs. Durrant; they sat on a sofa opposite the windows, talking together and watching the young people, and congratulating themselves on the improvement in Ethel's looks, which seemed to promise ultimate recovery from the melancholy that was sapping her young life.

After a while, some one suggested the Lancers, and a set was formed, but it was found one person was wanted to complete the eight couple.

"Never mind," cried Ethel, who was in a mad, wild mood, whose blue eyes shone feverishly, whose fair cheeks were flushed. "I will dance with the cushion," seizing one off the sofa. "That will do for a partner, unless Squire Thornhill will come and dance with me. I wish he would. I should like to have him for a partner."

There was silence for a full minute after this sally, for almost every one present knew the history of Thornhill House, and its erstwhile wicked, bloody-minded master. Then as the music struck up, an icy, chilling blast swept through the room, and Mrs. Durrant and her friend, sitting spell-bound and speechless, saw Ethel going through the figures of the Lancers, and moving by her side a tall, rakish-looking man, with a sensual evil face, and wicked gleaming eyes, in a heavily-laced red coat, and long white satin waistcoat, and the peruke and ruffles of a long bygone time.

They could not speak, their tongues clave to the roofs of their mouths. They could not stir; the power of volition seemed to have left them. They could only sit there feeling every hair on their heads stand erect, and bristling with the horror that froze the life-blood in their veins, and watch. In the galop, after the grand chain in the last figure, they saw this awful thing turn to its partner with a bow and a sardonic grin on its ghastly face, and flinging its arm round her waist, whirl her wildly away down the room.

Ethel shrieked and fell fainting on a couch, as her ghostly partner released her, and Mrs. Durrant, roused from her paralysis of fear by that appalling shriek, sprang up and hastened to her daughter's side. Ethel was white, and her lips were blue, and on her left breast, over her heart, was a black mark, as though a

burning hand had been pressed on it, and left its searing mark. A scene of indescribable confusion ensued. The mother lifted her darling's head, and restoratives were applied, but without effect. All their efforts were useless. She never regained consciousness, and died three days later, the doctors called in saying she must have received some terrible shock, which, in her delicate state of health, proved fatal. Her frail life going out like the snuff of a candle. Squire Thornhill's ghost had been merciful, and released her from her troubles, and a life which was only a burden since Humfrey ceased to love her.

## The White Star-Flower.

### A LEGEND OF LIFE.

ONCE long ago, in the depths of the forests-primeval, there dwelt a man whose name was Ilderim. A gentle, simple youth, who passed his days in tending his folds, upon the green hill-sides, or in chasing the wild roe-deer, through the silent, shadowy glades of the dim pine-forests.

But one day as he was chasing a fleet wild doe upon the hills, he chanced to miss his path, and when darkness—the sudden, swift, black darkness of the northern night—overtook him, he found that he had wandered far astray amidst the desolate peaks of the highest mountains. So he gave up his chase, and slowly and painfully began to retrace his steps.

But vainly did he seek the pathway! The night had closed in, dark and tempestuous about him. Scarce a star's ray could pierce through the impenetrable blackness of the sullen storm-swept sky. The pitiless night-wind, bitter and bleak, with the chill blast of an ice-bound sea, blew all around him; whilst from the valleys at his feet cold mists seemed to rise, which froze his blood and numbed his limbs. Nevertheless he toiled bravely onwards—onwards, though the cruel night-blasts cut him like sharp scourges, and the driving hailstones blinded his aching eyes, and the rough jagged flintstones maimed and wounded his tired feet—until at length, after long hours of hopeless toil, he chanced to miss his foothold, stumbled once, and then fell heavily to the ground, whence, faint and enfeebled, with cold and hunger, he had no power to rise, but lay prostrate and motionless, whilst the deadly numbness of a heavy torpor seemed to creep all over him. He knew this sleep meant death, yet he was powerless to shake it off! A still, calm, deadly languor was upon him. In a few moments he would cease to breathe—but suddenly a hand was laid upon his brow! Its touch was like a flame of liquid fire! His languid pulses stirred and quickened, and the blood rushed leaping through his veins, as with a sudden wondrous new-born strength, he leapt on to his feet, and gazed around him.

Then before him, through the white mist-wreaths which hung upon the mountain-side, he beheld a vision fairer than aught his uttermost dreams had ever dreamt ! The vision of one who bore indeed a woman's form, but was taller and lovelier, far, than the daughters of men. She was clad in pure white. A halo of transcendent light glowed above her head. And in her hand she bore a white star-flower, whose centre petals formed a cross ; whilst from each of its snow-white leaves there shone a dazzling brightness.

Awe-struck, and amazed, Ilderim fell on his knees before her. But with a gesture she bade him rise.

"Kneel not to me, O child of man," the radiant Spirit said. "But rise and follow me. For lo ! such sleep as thine is death—and the end for thee is not yet !"

Then trembling and in silence, Ilderim arose and followed her. Through storm and tempest. Through darkness and desolation, onwards she passed, unhindered and unharmed ; and Ilderim followed ever in her footsteps, guided always by the gleaming brightness of her white star-flower. And thus she led him back in safety to the valley wherein he dwelt, and on his own threshold would have left him. But Ilderim, being deeply moved, spoke to her, saying :

"O gentle Spirit ! Thou who from the far-off Gates of Light, and from the Land of the Immortals, hast deigned to wing an earthward flight to save and succour me ! I pray thee hear my prayer ! My heart is deeply moved by gazing on thy glorious flower, and all unworthy though I be, I yet would humbly ask this grace of thee—that ere thou leavest me thou mightest deign to give to me one spray of thy star-flower ?"

"Bold art thou, O mortal," the Spirit answered him, "to dare crave for such a thing ! Know this. The White Star-flower which thou beholdest, is the flower of the Highest Ideal ; whose blossoms grow upon the Tree of Immortality, whose first-fruits are in Paradise, and whose roots lie buried deep in the hearts of the faithful, and are watered with the tears and blood of many nations."

She paused. But within the heart of Ilderim the longing to possess the White Star-flower grew, with an ever-increasing and passionate pain of desire, and without it all life seemed worthless, and valueless, in his sight.



“Take from me all that I possess!” he cried, “all present joys, all future hopes—yea, and even my very life-blood would I gladly barter for but one petal of thy White Star-flower!”

The Spirit smiled on him. The sad yet tender smile of one who deeply feels for human woe; yet sorrowing doubts for human strength.

“Think well of what thou askest, O mortal,” she replied. “The flower which thou desirest can only be reached through much faith, much suffering, and much pain. They who would truly seek it, must deny themselves all baser things, all loves, and frailties of the flesh; forego all human ties which bind them earthwards, and must seek it patiently in silence and in solitude, oft-times in bitterest pain and anguished weariness. Hast thou strength enough for this? Behold, all around thee on thine own hills bloom many fair and fragrant flowers. The Asphodel, whose golden petals are like the showers of gold, which gladden men’s hearts for a while, and make their paths seem smooth and easy. The blood-red Mountain-lily, eternal emblem of that burning, passionate, earthborn love which quicken’s men’s pulses to madness, and their blood to liquid fire—the Laurel and the Oak-leaves, the stately symbols of triumphant glory, and of the wide-ringing adulation of the nations! All these are round about thee, and easy to thy hand. Say, dost thou still desire my White Star-flower, which can be purchased only in infinite pain and weariness?”

And Ilderim answered steadfastly:

“Yea, I do desire it. It alone.”

“I sought to prove thee, child of man,” the gentle Spirit said, “and well and wisely hast thou chosen. Yet one petal only can I give thee. It is the Leaf of Faith. All the rest thou must seek for thyself. It may be thou wilt have to journey far, and to endure much bitter pain, before thou find it. And many flowers shalt thou see, which bear it a so close resemblance as to have deceived many wise men throughout the ages—yet by this shalt thou tell the true from the false; it shall be, that when thou shalt lay this petal beside any other flower than that which bore it, that flower, however white or goodly it may have seemed, shall at its touch begin to shrivel and decay. Truth alone can bear the test of faith—so this shall be thy sign. Farewell!”

Then, placing one shining petal within his hand, the Spirit

vanished from his sight. And slowly and musingly Ilderim turned and entered his own dwelling.

But no sleep came to him that night ; for the desire to seek the White Star-flower burned ever within his heart. And as soon as the red shafts of the growing dawn began to streak the pallor from the morning sky, he arose and went to seek his comrades, and his kinsfolk.

"I am come," he said, "my friends, to bid you all farewell—for I go upon a long journey, and it may be that I shall see your faces again no more."

"Whither dost thou go?" they said, as they clustered, wondering, about him.

And he answered and told them of the White Star-flower, and how he went to seek it.

Then they mocked him, saying:

"O fool! thou art surely mad, or drunk with wine! What is this fable that thou tellest us? We have never seen this White Star-flower of which thou speakest, and none of our wise men or sages have seen it. Therefore it cannot be—return again to thy hunting and thy flocks, and dream no more these foolish dreams."

But Ilderim would not heed them.

"I must seek my White Star-flower," he said.

"But if thou never find it?"

"At least I shall have striven."

"Yet perchance thou wilt perish in thy search?"

"That is as may be," he replied. "Death is sometimes greater than Life."

"It is madness!" they cried.

"It is duty," he answered.

"Duty, to die thus!—for a dream, a shadow, a vision!"

"Duty, to seek the Highest, and let the rest go by."

Then, when they saw that he would not heed them, they grew bitter with anger against him.

So sorrowfully Ilderim turned and left them; and his heart was heavy within him, for he had dwelt amongst them all his days, and would fain have parted from them in peace and amity.

For many months he journeyed on through the deep forests of his own land, often cold, often hungry, often weary, yet never



ceasing in his search. And when the long winter had passed away, and the soft Spring began to break, he found that he had left the tents of his own people far behind him, and had reached the sunlit Eastern plains, where dwell the cities of the wise men of the earth. Above the gates of the greatest of these, in letters of marble, was graven these words: "This is the Home of Knowledge, and of the Wisdom of the World."

"Here, surely," thought Ilderim, "I shall find the White Star-flower!"

As he passed the barrier, the keeper of it asked him what he sought.

"I would fain speak," Ilderim answered, "with the wisest sage of all this city."

Then the keeper of the gates let him pass, and pointed him out the dwelling of the wisest sage. And presently Ilderim found himself within a mighty marble hall, all filled with parchments, and with ancient folios. A sculptured sphinx stood in its midst, and in her hand she held an ivory tablet, all graven with the old lost wisdom of the dead philosophers and magi. And before her stood a venerable old man. His head was silvered with the long passing of Time, a loose white robe flowed all around him, and his mien was grave and majestic in its calm and passionless repose.

And Ilderim bowed himself before him, saying:

"I am come, my Father, from the far-off northern lands, to seek the white star-flower, the flower of the Highest Ideal, whose first fruits are in Paradise, yet whose blossoms may be found on earth. And I have come to thee to seek thy counsel, for men say thou art the wisest sage in all this city."

"Rightly hast thou sought, my son, to find within these walls that which thou seekest. Since here alone, within the inmost shrine of our Eternal Temple of Knowledge, can it be found. The flower which thou callest the Flower of the Highest Ideal, is but another name for the Flower of Knowledge. Knowledge! which alone shall have power to satisfy thy deepest cravings, to raise thee high above thy fellows—to fill thy life with high ambitions, and thy soul with imperishable dreams! Follow me—and I will lead thee to the thing thou seekest."

Then the sage, with his slow, grave step, passed onwards through a mighty iron door, and up a steep, high, winding stair-

case. And Ilderim followed him as best he could, for these steps, which were called the Steps of Learning, were very old, and dark and slippery, and when he looked downwards the darkness veiled his sight, and when he looked upwards, the great heights seemed to make his brain reel and grow giddy. At length, however, after great labour, he reached the top, and stood within a vast stone chamber, which was raised high up above the tallest of the city housetops. And in the centre of this room there hung a great dark curtain; and the sage raised the veil, and behind it was an Altar of marble, on which there stood a bowl of beaten gold, and in it grew a fair white flower, so like the Star-flower that Ilderim gave a cry of joy as he beheld it.

"Behold," said the sage, "the flower thou seekest!"

Then Ilderim, greatly rejoicing, took his Star-flower petal from where it lay above his heart, and laid it against the white flower.

But as he looked, of a sudden his heart fell; for no sooner had the Star-flower touched it, than the other flower grew all at once shrivelled and dark, and fell to the earth — faded, and dead!

Then the sage uttered a great cry of wrath, and turned upon Ilderim, saying:

"A thousand curses fall upon thine impious head! O thou blasphemer and desecrator of holy things! Away with thee from out my sight, lest, by the sacred helmet of Minerva, I should slay thee where thou standest!"

So Ilderim left the temple of the sages, and as he passed sadly onwards through the city he came to another temple, greater and far more beautiful than was the shrine of knowledge. And as he stood beneath its carven porticoes and pondered long if he should enter, there came an old man and stood beside him. And he was hard and rough of aspect; and in his hand he held a Scourge of knotted cords. And the Scourge was wet with drops of blood.

"Who art thou, O my father?" Ilderim asked, "and dost thou dwell within this city?"

"Nay, my son," the old man answered. "The wise men of this city know me not, though they call oft upon my name. My name is Wisdom. Many there are who seek me, though few be

they who find me ; for through the Veil of Self men cannot see my face. But some have found my brother, Knowledge, who is gentler and softer than I, and, holding him, have thought that they held me ! ”

“ What hast thou in thine hand ? ” Ilderim asked him.

“ This is the Scourge of Reason, wherewith I scourge the follies of the nations, and the blood on it is the blood of many Ages.”

Then Ilderim said :

“ Wise art thou, my Father, beyond the wisdom of men, therefore I pray thee be my guide within this Temple.”

So together they entered the Temple of Art. Now this temple was wondrous fair to see. Its floors of gold and silver were all inlaid with rubies, and with delicately scintillating opal stones. Tall alabaster columns supported its crystal dome. And all around the walls hung many rare and lovely paintings. Before one of these Ilderim stood long gazing, for it seemed to him to be the picture of his White Star-flower ! But whilst he looked there came by he who had painted it—and his face was wild and haggard with care, and his eyes were burning and strange, in their feverish unrest.

“ Is this man mad ? ” Ilderim asked.

“ Yea,” answered the old man, “ for he hath genius ! ”

“ Genius !—what is that ? ”

“ It means, ‘ A wandering Sorrow in a world of dreams ! ’ ”

“ And he desires—what ? ”

“ He seeks his Ideal.”

“ With what ? ”

“ With his heart’s blood.”

“ And will he ever find it ? ”

“ Perchance one day he may see the Shadow of it.”

“ But no man can hold a Shadow ? ”

“ No, but many men have died for one ! ”

And as he looked, Ilderim saw that many mocked this man, and taunted him, and some spat on him, and struck him with their hands. And he said :

“ Why do all these so treat him ? For surely this man is greater than they ? ”

And the old man answered :

“ They spit upon him now. And when he is dead, they will

erect fanes and temples in his honour—for so it hath ever been since time was.”

Then Ilderim said :

“These men are all searching, even as I am searching ; and this picture is like unto my star-flower. I will abide now with them, for perchance I may find here that which I seek.”

Then the old man smote him across the eyes with his sharp scourge, so that the blood spurted.

“Now,” he said, “look again upon the picture.

And Ilderim did so. And through his mist of pain, he beheld in the picture nought save a dark and unsightly daub of colour !

And the old man said : “Come.” And together they left the Temple of Art. And Ilderim followed him patiently, though the way was stiff and steep, and the path was filled with great rough boulders, whose sharp points cut his feet, and made him lame.

And as they went onwards, up the steep sides of a mighty mountain, presently they came to a number of huge, dark caverns pierced deep into the earth. And inside these caverns, many men were labouring. And the sweat stood on their brows. And their backs were bent, so that they could not see the sunlight. And they grovelled upon the ground, seeking eagerly for little bits of yellow shining earth. And when one found a piece, then all the others gathered around him, and strove with him for it. And the weakly ones were crushed, and the strongest prevailed always.

And Ilderim said :

“When they have found, and held their golden metal, then are they glad, no doubt, and pass swiftly out again into the sunlight ? ”

But the old man sadly shook his head.

“No,” he answered. “They have then no further desire for the sunlight, but abide on in these caverns till death comes.”

“And what do they ? ”

“They are decked with the shining earth, and walk over the prostrate bodies of their comrades, until their own bodies crumble and decay with age ! ”

Then presently as they went, they came to a deep dark swift-flowing river, and Ilderim's heart sank within him, for this river was swollen and turbid. And on its surface floated many

dead bodies of men and women, and their garments were stained with blood, and their dead hands clutched the foul dark river-weeds, even as they had done in their death-struggle!

And the old man said :

"This is the River of Sorrow, and of the Bitter-Waters of Adversity. And hither must thou pass, my son, to reach the Land of the Star-flower."

And Ilderim answered :

"I cannot cross these waters, for surely I shall perish even as those others did!"

"Not so," the old man said. "These perished all because they strove to swim looking downwards. But to those who are brave of heart and swim looking upwards it is given to reach the further shore. Fear not; only remember that thou look not downwards, or thou shalt see all manner of foul and hideous Shapes, which through their dark terrors shall terrify thee, so that thou hast no more power to swim, but shalt be dragged down by them and so shall perish miserably."

Then Ilderim plunged bravely in, and with his head high lifted to the sky, he cleaved the rushing waters with a fair bold stroke. And so he came into the middle of the stream, when suddenly, a wave much greater than the others, seemed to rise before him in one vast seething mass of foaming angry waters, and with a loud sound as of thunder it burst so close to him that he cowered away from it, so that his head sank, and the Bitter-Waters rushed into his mouth and seemed to choke him. Lower and lower he sank, and all around him, he saw the foul forms of the hideous Shapes, who, with their fiendish hell-born laughs of triumph, seemed to draw him downwards, downwards, to the black depths of the putrid, poisoned waters. A great despair swept over him. But even at that moment he saw something white floating near to him. It was the petal of the White Star-flower! Upwards it floated through the turbid waters, and Ilderim fixed his despairing eyes upon it—and even as he looked, the dark fiends seemed to loosen their hold—then with his one free hand he firmly seized the snow-white leaf, and with a wild howl of baffled rage, the foul fiends saw him rise slowly upwards, until at length he reached the top, and breathed again the wholesome air, and could see once more the blue sweep of the sky. Then with a few brave strokes he

reached the shore, and stood again by the old man's side, weary and worn, yet safe and free!

And on this side of the river, the face of the land was changed utterly. Behind them lay the grim mountains and dark caverns; and all around them now shone purple vineyards and silvery olive-groves, and soft rippling streams, whose sun-kissed waters glided smoothly past the fragrant myrtle bowers, where the nightingales sang amidst the roses. And in the centre of this land, there stood a city more lovely far than aught Ilderim had ever seen. And above its trellised gates were written these words: "This is the City of Pleasure and of Eternal Youth." And before these gates Ilderim paused, and would fain have entered. But the old man sternly beckoned him on.

"O fool," he cried, "to desire to loiter in this poisonous land or to enter this evil city! Few that enter leave it again—and none as they have entered!"

But Ilderim said:

"It looks very fair. Let us enter here for a while, and rest, and be glad."

"I cannot enter," the old man answered, "if thou goest, thou must go alone. And to thy peril."

But Ilderim did not heed his words, for the gates had now been opened by the two lovely, slender-limbed, golden-curved maidens who guarded them; and whilst he stood still doubting, they came, and softly drew him in, then gently closed the marble gates.

And as he passed through the city, there met him a group of youths and maidens, and these all clustered round about, saying:

"Welcome to our land, O gentle stranger, thou who art so young, and comely to be seen! Come with us, and behold our wondrous chariot races, and the combat for the Golden Apple which our fair Queen Alcarès has commanded; saying that to him who is victor, shall be given her royal hand and all the Kingship of this goodly land!"

So Ilderim went with them through the beautiful city, and on each side of him he beheld the graceful houses with their hanging balconies, all garlanded with roses and with heliotropes, and the stately palaces, whose golden domes flashed in the sunlight. And soon, they stood within a marble hall, in the



middle of which was a vast Arena. Many tiers of seats rose all around it, and in the centre of these, upon a throne of gold and ivory, sat the stately Queen. All lovely was she, even as some later vision of that faithless, fair Italian Helen, named of old "The World's Desire." A thousand sparkling gems flashed from amidst the loose gold of her tresses. Her starry eyes gleamed passionate, yet cold, from beneath the shadow of their drooped white lids. In her hand she held a Golden Apple; and with her red curled lips, she seemed to smile, half-amorous and half-mocking, on the world of men.

At her feet, within the Arena, a huge brawny giant stood alone. And before him lay the bleeding body of the man whom he had slain.

"Behold," whispered one of the youths, "that is the great Thanatos, the mightiest man in all this land. Three champions from amongst our bravest warriors hath he already slain, and as yet his armour is not even pierced! Truly the hand of our Queen will be for him!"

Then Thanatos, standing in the midst of the Arena, cried, saying:

"Doth any other man come forward to contest the Golden Apple, or do I claim it now?"

And there was a great silence throughout the house. For since they had seen the three great champions slain, no man durst measure his strength against that of the invincible Thanatos. Then Ilderim's heart burned within him, and he said:

"O would that I were not a stranger in this land!"

"The lists are open to all," the youth beside him answered.

Then Ilderim leapt up to his feet, crying:

"I accept the challenge, and will fight thee, O Thanatos."

Then Thanatos turned scornfully upon him, saying:

"Art thou then so sick of life, O foolish stripling, so to rush upon thy death?—Yet since thou wilt, come hither, and I will still thy boastful tongue for ever!"

Then one brought him a suit of armour and a sword, and Ilderim stepped boldly down into the arena, and the two men closed together. Locked in a deadly struggle, their armour clanking as they moved, long did they struggle fiercely, until at length Thanatos, maddened by Ilderim's brave resistance,

suddenly drew his dagger, and with the bound of a tiger, sprang forward, brandishing it aloft. Another instant and it would have pierced Ildirim's heart, when with a sudden skilful movement he sprang quickly aside, receiving the blow upon his steel buckler, then, ere Thanatos could recover himself, he dealt him a sweeping sword-cut, which, piercing through the joints of his armour, felled him to the earth in a loud crashing fall ; with his blood flowing over the floor, and a look of deadliest hatred on his livid face !

Then a ringing cheer broke from the populace.

"Slay him," they cried, "O valiant stranger ! Slay him, even as, had he conquered, he had slain thee !"

Then Ildirim, with his foot upon his prostrate foeman, raised his sword. But at that moment he seemed to see the Spirit of the Star-flower standing sorrowfully before him, and his hand fell quietly to his side.

Then the beautiful Queen commanded that he should come to her. And Ildirim came and laid his sword down at her feet, and she said :

"Whence cometh thou, O noble stranger ?"

And he told her of the White Star-flower, and of how he went to seek it. And as she heard, her face grew dark. But she said nought save that he had well earned the Golden Apple and the Kingship of the land. But now that the ardour of war had passed from him, Ildirim's heart had grown heavy again, with longing for his White Star-flower, and he said :

"Lady, I fear lest I should seem uncourtly in my words ; and it may be I did foolishly to join the combat, for alas ! the Kingship of this city cannot be for me, until I find my White Star-flower."

Then the queen said, "Within my royal palace grows the flower thou seekest. Come with me, and thou shalt behold it."

And willingly Ildirim followed her. And inside the palace halls they brought him a suit of golden armour, and a silver crested helmet. And he sat upon an ivory Throne beside the Queen. Then Alcarès commanded, saying :

"Bring hither the Great White Flower. The Flower of Victory."

Then the Great Officers of the Land brought in a mighty golden casket and laid it at the feet of Ildirim, and did him



royal homage. And Ilderim opened the casket. And in it lay a Great White Flower. And as his eyes rested upon it, so glittering and glorious did it seem, that for a space his sight was dazzled! Then he laid his Star-flower petal against it, and behold! the Great White Flower grew dark with crimson streaks.

"Alas!" cried Ilderim. "This glorious Flower is stained with the blood-red Dews of Death!"

Then Alcarès murmured softly to him, saying:

"Come with me, gentle youth, and I will show thee yet another Flower which is fairer far than this!" And then the great Queen led him into a lovely fragrant chamber, dimly lighted with fair waxen tapers, and on the table was spread a stately banquet. The rich wines blushed and sparkled in the golden flagons, and in their midst a chiselled marble group of Venus and Adonis held up the clusters of rich purple grapes and golden melons. Then with a gesture Alcarès dismissed the waiting slaves, and with her own royal hands poured out the sparkling wine that Ilderim should drink. And drawing forth her lute, she sang to him a soft sweet song of love and war.

Then as Ilderim heard the deadly sweetness of her song, and felt the strong rush of the sweet wine in his veins, and gazed all dazed upon her royal loveliness, all desire to seek the White Star-flower passed from his heart, and he knelt down at her feet enraptured, murmuring:

"O give me but the flower thou lovest! And let me stay with thee for ever!"

Then the fair Queen bent down, and kissed him with her red curled lips, and from her breast she drew a soft, white flower, and it looked white as driven snow, and its sweet heavy fragrance seemed to fill the air.

Like one who dreams in an enchanted land, Ilderim gazed long at it, until at length, from he knew not whence, across his drowsy memory there shot the sudden remembrance of his White Star-flower! With a mighty effort he threw off the spell of lethargy which seemed to hold him, and started to his feet, and drawing forth his petal of the White Star-flower, he laid it against the other, crying:

"Unless it be the true—I will not have thy flower, O Queen."

And even as he spoke the Queen's white flower seemed of a sudden to grow dark and unsightly as a withered leaf!

"Behold, O queen," he cried, "thy flower cannot stand the test, for at the pure touch of this petal it has faded, and lo! it is now dark as the Passion-flower, not white as the Star-flower!"

Then Ilderim turned and fled from the palace. And as he went, the queen, being very wroth, took a bow and slung in it a sharp arrow, and aimed at him. And the arrow pierced him just above the heart, and raised a festering wound. But Ilderim would not pause until he had passed the utmost boundary of that poisonous land, and reached again the desert which Wisdom had told him he must pass. Now on the boundary of this desert flowed a little stream of sweet clear water, and here Ilderim bathed his wound and rested awhile. Before him stretched the long, hot, trackless waste of sandy desert, with no sign of tree or water; so ere he started again upon his journey, he plucked a gourd which grew beside the brook, and filling it with water, took it with him.

All through that long, long day he toiled bravely forwards, though the hot sun beat pitilessly down upon his head, and the parching heat blistered his wounds, and made them burn like fire—still he toiled onwards, until at length the violet night threw her cool veil above the throbbing earth, and one by one the silver stars began to gleam in the fathomless skies. And then did Ilderim rest also, and throwing himself down upon the sand, he slept. But he had scarce slept one hour, when suddenly he was awakened by the slow creeping of a stealthy footstep! He opened his eyes. He saw a huge form looming above him, and the flash of steel in the moonlight. He leapt up; the murderer at his movement started and paused, and in the clear moonlight Ilderim saw the wicked face and glaring eyes of Thanatos!

"O coward," he cried, "and traitor! I spared thy life in the Arena, and yet thou stealest here to murder me whilst I sleep!"

"Yea," answered Thanatos, with a cruel laugh of hatred. "I hate thee, O thou northern stripling, and I will have thy blood—since in war and in love, twice hast thou conquered me."

Then once more he raised his dagger to plunge it into Ilderim's heart. But the aim was bad; it missed the heart, and struck fast in the shoulder. Gathering all his force together for one supreme effort, Ilderim with his left hand wrenched the dagger from out his quivering flesh, and with his right hand

struck his cowardly foe a ringing blow upon the temple, which felled him stunned and prostrate to the earth.

Then feebly Ilderim dragged himself a few yards off; and, very weary with loss of blood and the long march of the day, he fell for a while into a feverish, pain-tossed sleep. When he awoke the fierce sun had again risen high in the heavens, and the sultry air seemed throbbing with the burning, shadowless heat.

Very weak from his unhealed wound, Ilderim raised himself upon his elbow. Far away beyond the trackless waste of sand he just could see the first boundary of the Star-flower Land, with the cool, waving, shadowy green of its fair woods and glades. But one more day's journey and he would have reached it! But before he could travel onwards, he must have water to renew his strength, and quench his parched thirst. He raised his hand towards the gourd. It was nearly empty! Only enough for one man's draught. As he was raising it to his lips, his eyes fell upon Thanatos, who was still lying in his deadly swoon. A swoon from which, unless water were given him, he would never rally, saving perchance for a few dark hours of fevered agony before the end should come!

"He has what he deserves," Ilderim muttered, "a coward who creeps through the darkness to murder the man who spared his life, deserves no better fate than that he should perish thus!"

But even as he spoke, across his fevered brain there seemed to fall a soft low voice, which whispered:

"If thine enemy thirst, give him to drink."

With the gourd still in his hand, Ilderim paused. He thought of the Star-flower Land. He thought of the evil this man had done him, and the struggle was hard and bitter. But at length with a supreme effort, he steadily bore the gourd to the lips of the other. As the water touched his parched throat Thanatos suddenly quivered all over, and recovering from his faintness slowly opened his eyes. He seemed like one dazed.

"I tried to take your life," he muttered, "and you have given me your water, and yourself will perish."

"Yea," answered Ilderim, "so shall it be. Farewell. Go now in peace, but ere thou leavest me, I pray thee, place the Star-flower petal above my heart—for so shall I die easier."

Reverently Thanatos did as he was bid. For the first time in his hard cold life, soft tears of tender sorrow, dropped down from his eyes. Upon the sand close by Ilderim did they fall. Then at Ilderim's bidding he sadly turned and left him. And his heart was heavy within him, for he knew that a nobler man than he lay dying in his stead !

And Ilderim's heart, too, was very heavy. It seemed so hard to die thus, for the sake of a draught of water—to die with all his great hopes unfulfilled, his long search unrewarded, his life-labour all in vain ! A weary striving, ending in nothing, nothing ! His tired head sank wearily upon his breast.

But at that moment, as his glance fell upon the sand, wet with the tears of Thanatos, he saw a tiny spear of green beginning to pierce upwards. Higher and higher it rose, until at length a fair white flower, whose centre petals formed a Cross, began to unfold itself upon the slender shaft !

He had grown very faint and weary ; but with a last supreme effort he raised himself, and laid his own petal against that of the White Flower. For the first time the flower it touched remained pure white !

A gleam of unutterable gladness shone in Ilderim's dying eyes, as for one brief moment of unspeakable ecstasy he stood face to face with the Realisation of his Ideal ! Then the Darkness veiled his sight.

He had found in death that which he had sought for vainly all his life !

CLARE VYVIAN.

## The Prior's Cell : A Ghost Story.

BY DARLEY DALE.

Author of "THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH," "FAIR KATHERINE," etc.

ON the side of a hill in the south of England, stands a small gabled house, with lattice windows ; close by is a handsome building, which, on enquiry, the traveller learns is the church and monastery of the Dominican Fathers, whose white habits are now a familiar sight in the large garden which stretches up the hill behind the monastery.

There is apparently nothing remarkable about the house beyond its picturesque appearance, its lovely situation, and in summer its pretty garden, bright with flowers ; but the stranger soon learns it is remarkable for this—it is haunted. A mysterious light is seen in one window on certain nights in the year, though no lamp, candle or gas is in the room ; many people have seen this light as they climb the hill to the house or the church, but no one has ever been able to account for it.

The room in which this light appears is still called the Prior's cell, because in olden times, when the present monastery was being built, this house was used as the Priory, and this particular haunted room was then the Prior's cell, or rather, his sitting-room ; his actual cell opened out of it.

The origin of the light is supposed to date from Ascension-eve, 1848, when a very strange event occurred in this room.

The community was then very small, and the accommodation very limited. There were no cloisters, no church ; one of the downstairs rooms was fitted up as the chapel, another served for the chapter-house, a third as the refectory and common-room of the Fathers, a fourth as the noviciate. Upstairs were the dormitories and cells of the Fathers, lay-brothers and novices ; the Prior's cell was really two small rooms which communicated with each other, in one of which he slept, and in the other, the haunted room, he usually sat.

There were only three Fathers living there at that time, the Prior, Father Raphael, the novice-master, and Father Peter, who

acted as procurator and cantor ; the Prior combined the offices of lector or teacher to the novices, and of parish-priest, with his duties as Prior. Five or six novices, and two lay-brothers who had to cook and do the work of the house, completed the number of Friars, until one November day a new lay-brother arrived, and received a warm welcome, especially from the other lay-brothers, who were glad to have some one to help them.

The new arrival was a novice and a convert ; his name was Brother Clement ; he was young, tall, thin and dark, with a mild, but somewhat sly expression, who looked as if butter would not melt in his mouth.

The Prior, a big, burly, shrewd, clever man, was not prepossessed by Brother Clement's appearance, and from the first suspected other than the highest motives had drawn him to the religious life.

Father Raphael, however, was more hopeful of his novice, and Father Peter was inclined to like him because of his voice, a good tenor, which was very useful in the choir. When Brother Clement had been three months at the Priory, he was made porter, a post which suited him exactly, for he was a lazy fellow who shirked work, and to whom the rule of silence was particularly distasteful ; as porter, his duties were not very onerous, and he could and did gossip with every one who came to the monastery.

Father Raphael was a very saintly man ; he was tall, but very spare and thin, with refined features and an ascetic cast of countenance, indeed he was a very ascetic man ; but though a strict novice-master, he was much beloved by his novices, and in his presence Brother Clement's conduct was always most exemplary.

The Prior, however, constantly caught the new lay-brother gossiping, and, had the matter rested only with him, Brother Clement would soon have received his *cong  *. But Father Raphael pleaded for him, and the Prior had a great respect for the novice-master, though his judgment did not always commend itself to his shrewder sense.

Among other objections, Brother Clement was exceedingly ignorant of his religion ; and while Father Raphael attributed this to his being so recent a convert, and to his natural stupidity, the Prior was at a loss to understand it. Brother Clement, he

maintained, ought not to have been received into the Church, far less into the Order, in such ignorance; and as for his stupidity, he thought he was much cleverer than he chose to appear.

Lent was late that year, and at Easter Father Raphael was so unwell from fasting, that the Prior insisted on his going to their London house for a fortnight for change of air when Easter was well over. His departure was postponed several times; finally he started, a fortnight before Ascension Day, on the understanding that he would return for that feast.

A few days after Father Raphael left, Father Peter, the procurator, came to the Prior with a very long face to tell him that a cask of beer, which usually lasted them a month, had been finished in a week.

"Was it the same size as usual?" said the Prior.

"Yes, Father."

"They must have let it run out; who has charge of it?"

"Brother Clement."

"Brother Clement!" said the Prior scornfully; "well, either he has drunk it, or he has let it run out; take the key away from him, and let some one else have charge of it."

"Yes, Father."

"And you can warn Brother Clement if anything of this kind occurs again, his time here will be very short," said the Prior.

A week passed, during which Brother Clement seemed to have profited by his warning, for he did his work both in choir and out of choir exceedingly well, and the Prior began to think he might have misjudged him.

A day or two before Father Raphael was expected home, the procurator again came to the Prior with a long face. This time it was to tell him that half a barrel of lamp oil had mysteriously disappeared, a forty-gallon barrel was emptied in exactly half the usual time.

"Has Brother Clement charge of that?" said the Prior, his suspicions reviving.

"No, Father, no; Brother Stephen. He always draws it, and he vows the last time he went to it, it was as near as he could tell half full. He had not tilted it, and it always lasts some time after it is tilted, but it was quite empty this morning."

"It looks as if we had a dishonest person in the house. I

am sure of every one except Brother Clement, and I really don't see how he could have made off with the oil had he wished to do so. However, wait a few days. I can't do anything till Father Raphael comes home, and then I'll sift the matter thoroughly. I expect him the day after to-morrow, as I have heard nothing to the contrary. He is sure to be home for Ascension Day," said the Prior.

On Ascension-eve the Prior was sitting in his cell, the window of which overlooked the valley, when there was a tap at the door and Father Raphael walked in.

It was about seven o'clock, and the Prior, who had just come from supper, was waiting for the bell to summon him to compline, after which solemn silence was the rule in the monastery until after mass the next morning, when simple silence reigned till after dinner at half-past twelve. To break solemn silence is a serious fault, and one Father Raphael was rarely guilty of, so it was like him to come straight to the Prior, had he anything to say, before getting his supper, for by the time he had finished that solemn silence would have begun.

Father Raphael was in his habit, not in secular clothes, a fact the Prior remembered afterwards, though it did not strike him at the time that the novice-master could not possibly have had time to change if he arrived, as presumably he did, by the evening train. In those days, the friars never went beyond their own grounds in their habits, or, had they done so, they would have been liable to be pelted with mud, which is not improving to the white cloth of which the Dominican habit is made.

But on this occasion Father Raphael arrived in his white habit, with his long black cloak, or "cappa" as it is properly called, over it. He threw off the "cappa" and pushed the white hood back from his tonsured head as he seated himself.

He looked very pale, but he was neither heated nor out of breath, and yet he must have walked very fast from the station to arrive so soon. There was a far-away look in his eyes as he gazed dreamily at the setting sun, which shone on the window and flooded the valley with a sea of rich golden light.

"Well, Father, how are you?" said the Prior.

"Better, thank you, Father Prior, much better," replied the novice-master absently.

"Did you enjoy the change?"



"Yes, Father, yes," answered Father Raphael, in a dreamy tone.

"How did you leave the other Fathers?" continued the Prior, seeing the novice-master was not inclined to talk of his own accord.

"All well, Father, all well. They were very kind, most kind to me," answered Father Raphael, in the same absent way.

"Poor fellow, he does not seem much better. I dare say he is tired," thought the Prior.

"Have you had supper?" he asked.

"Supper! no, Father, no, thank you, I won't take anything more to-night. I want to tell you something before the bell rings for compline, something I think you ought to know at once, as it concerns us all, but chiefly Brother Clement."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Prior anxiously, pricking up his ears at the mention of Brother Clement.

"Yes, Father Prior. You were quite right in your judgment of him. He is, I grieve to say, an impostor. I doubt if he be a Catholic at all; if he be, it is only in name. He is in league with a gang of thieves, and, from what I hear, I fear we have been sufferers."

"Yes, indeed we have; at least, our beer and lamp-oil have been decreasing instead of increasing miraculously like Elijah's cruse. I suspected Brother Clement was at the bottom of it, indeed I was only awaiting your return to act in the matter," said the Prior, somewhat excitedly.

Father Raphael manifested no excitement, but continued his story in the same dreamy tone, touched with melancholy, which he had assumed from his entrance.

"Yes, he was. Since he has been porter, his friends have been carrying on quite a system of robbery. It appears one day they brought up an empty beer cask and carried off our full one. Another day they brought up an empty oil-barrel and took away ours, which must have been half full."

"It was," interrupted the Prior.

"Another time they brought up empty wine bottles and carried away our port and claret. In fact, I suppose, we shall never quite know to what extent we have been robbed unless Brother Clement confesses."

"The scoundrel! Whether he confesses or not, I'll unfrock

him and send him about his business to-morrow morning. But how is it no one has ever seen these rascals coming or going?"

"Because they always came when we were in choir."

Just then the bell rang for compline, and Father Raphael rose without another word, wrapped his "cappa" round him, and with a gentle sigh left the room, looking sadly and half-regretfully at the Prior as he did so.

The Prior was rather surprised to find Father Raphael did not come in to compline, for he never missed an office, but he concluded he had some work he was obliged to attend to at once.

It is the custom for the Dominican Fathers to rise at midnight and say matins and lauds in the chapel, but when Father Raphael did not come to office that night, the Prior was sure he must be seriously ill. No slight indisposition would hinder him, and he resolved to send for the doctor, without consulting Father Raphael, the next morning.

There was high mass at eight the next day, and as soon as the Prior had finished singing it, he went to the refectory for his frugal breakfast of tea and toast.

"Has Father Raphael said his mass yet, Brother?" he asked of the lay-brother who brought him his breakfast.

"He is not back yet, Father."

"Nonsense, he came back last evening by the six o'clock train, and sat for twenty minutes in my room talking to me. Just go to his cell and see if he is there; he must be ill, for he was not in choir at compline or matins," said the Prior, beginning to feel alarmed, and to regret that he had not made inquiries sooner.

The lay-brother disappeared, and returned in about five minutes to say Father Raphael was not in his cell and evidently had not been there.

"Neither of the lay-brothers nor Father Peter have seen him, Father," said Brother Stephen, kissing his black scapular as he spoke, to signify he was confessing a fault, which the Prior knew was that he had broken the rule of simple silence by taking upon himself to make these inquiries.

Brother Stephen was of a very curious disposition, and had solemn silence been reigning, he would have broken it, in spite of the penance which would follow this grave fault.

The Prior was now seriously alarmed; Father Raphael must have left the house almost immediately he left the Prior's cell,

but why had he done so, and where could he have gone? It was against the rules of the Fathers to go out after six without asking the Prior's leave, and Father Raphael was the last man to break such a rule.

"I can't understand it," said the Prior, as he went to the chapter-house, where he had given orders a full chapter would be held at nine that morning.

During the chapter, while the Prior was denouncing Brother Clement, and passing sentence on him, having related Father Raphael's conversation with him the previous evening, a telegraph-boy arrived with a message for him.

Brother Stephen heard the bell and left the chapter-room to answer it, bringing the telegram back with him on his return.

Something prompted the Prior to open the telegram immediately, and as he read it, his ruddy face turned pale, and his burly figure fell back in his chair, while the startled brothers looked on in fear and wonder.

With a desperate effort the Prior pulled himself together, and, speaking in a voice trembling with emotion, he said:

"My brothers, I have sad news for you. Listen, and you, you impostor, listen here. It was not the living but the dead who denounced you last night to me. This telegram is from our London house, and says, 'Father Raphael died suddenly here last night at seven o'clock.'"

Half-stifled exclamations, followed by the sobs of the novices, greeted this announcement, in the midst of which Brother Clement, who had been standing sulkily in the middle of the room, advanced, and threw himself at the Prior's feet, trembling with fear, and grovelling in the dust.

"Father, Father, it is true, every word of it. I confess it all. The Lord has found me out, for the Lord's sake forgive me, Father. I'll submit to any penance, if you'll only let me stay. I am a wicked wretch, but I was led on by others. Oh! Father, only give me another trial, and I'll never deceive you again. For the love of Heaven let me stay; for our Lady's sake forgive me."

The scene was getting so painful, what with the heart-broken novices, some of them mere boys, sobbing in their seats, Father Peter speechless from emotion, and this miserable lay-brother grovelling at his feet, that the Prior, who was very much upset

by the news of the death, and by the fact that his strange visitor had been from the realm of spirits, put an end to it as quickly as possible.

"You may stay. Get up, and come to my cell in an hour's time," he said to Brother Clement, and then he dismissed the chapter.

Such is the story. Whether the appearance of Father Raphael was subjective or objective, whether the Prior was sleeping and saw and heard him only in a dream, whether his disembodied spirit at the moment of death was permitted to wander to the priory to deliver this message and save a soul, for Brother Clement reformed, none can say ; but from that Ascension-eve no one has ever been able to explain that mysterious light still frequently seen in the Prior's cell.

## The Noël-Bird.

### A LEGEND OF LIFE.

ONCE in a fragrant, sun-kissed garden of flowers there dwelt a maiden fair to see. And the dew of youth was in her heart, and the smile of truth was on her lips. And her soul was pure, so that she could understand the hidden language of all birds and flowers. Each day as soon as the red shafts of the growing dawn had streaked the pallor from the morning sky she would rise and pass into her garden, and at her coming each flower would lift its gracious head and seem to smile on her, and for her sake the tender pale wood-anemone would unfold its starry dew-kissed loveliness. To welcome her the slender hyacinth, blue and white, would ring its fairy woodland peal. At her coming the golden asphodel would uncloset its fragrant sun-kissed petals, and all the birds within the garden would sing their sweetest morning melodies.

And of these birds, the three she loved the best were a glorious golden-crested eagle, a white-winged wood-dove, and a little gentle, soft-songed redbreast.

Now one day, as this fair maiden was wandering through her garden glades, she fell to wondering what might be the legends of her best-loved birds. And pausing beneath the tall cedar-tree, on which the eagle had his dwelling, she called to him saying :

“O golden-crested monarch of the mountains, tell me, I pray, what is the unwritten legend of thy royal race?”

And the eagle answered :

“Ours is a deathless tale of war and victory.”

For a moment the fair-souled maiden looked with wondering awe upon the warrior bird, then slowly she passed onwards. And as she went her glance fell on the white-plumed dove which rested midst the slender boughs of an acacia-tree near by. A lovely bird, with eyes soft, dark and mystical, and notes as hushed and tender as the west wind sighing amidst the dreaming lilies.

And the maiden said :

“ Oh, white-winged dove !—emblem throughout all ages of the Eternal Beautiful and Pure—tell me, I pray, what is the legend of thy stainless race ? ”

And the white dove made answer :

“ Ours is a dream of purity, serene and shadowless ! ”

For a while the maiden gazed with thoughtful reverence on the white-winged dove. Then slowly she passed onwards, as though as yet unsatisfied of soul. And as she went, beside her she beheld the little redbreast. And she said :

“ Oh, little redbreast, tell me, I pray, what is the legend of thy gentle race ? ”

And the redbreast made answer :

“ Ours is a tale of everlasting love ! ”

Then the maiden said, “ Say on,” and this was the legend that the redbreast recounted :

Once long ago in the days when my ancestors were wholly brown of breast, there dwelt some of our kindred within a far-off eastern land, and these birds built their nests within the dim old cedar-woods which clothed the borders of an old, old city ; a city older than Rome itself, whose gardens were fragrant with the pink foam of the almond-tree, and with the golden blossoms of the starry cistus, and above which glowed the sapphire blue of cloudless skies.

Yet though this city was so fair—fair with the ancient purity of form and outline, and brilliant with the grace of eastern colouring—yet, nevertheless, men said that it was very vile, and stained with a dark corruption which had polluted it, core through, even as some dark canker-worm may befoul the loveliness of a fair white rose.

Now one day, as one of my kindred was winging his homeward flight above the flat, flower-laden roofs of this fair city, he chanced to see a sight so strange, that all his gaze was rivetted upon it, and lighting on the bough of an adjacent almond-tree he waited there awhile to watch. The space in front of one of the great white marble palaces was peopled with a vast, wild, seething multitude of men and women. The tumult of a myriad voices rose up and seemed to cleave the very sky. Cries, fervid and impassioned, resounded all through the echoing air, intermingled with the loud clash of the Roman soldiers' armour, the wailing of the trampled-down women and children, and the

fierce imprecations of the infuriated populace. And through the midst of this wild throng there walked a man of calm and noble aspect. Unmoved by all the clamorous outcries of the populace. He stood calm and still. No bitterness, no fear was in His face, only the unutterable sadness an infinite pity shone in His clear eyes as He looked around him on the restless multitudes and on the fair outlines of that goodly city, whose lofty temple dome glistened like gold beneath the bright flame of an Eastern sun.

Presently a momentary hush came over the populace as the prisoner entered the marble palace. Then, after a while, there came out to them one who, from his bearing, seemed to hold high office in the land. And he cried, saying :

“Will ye have Christ, or Barabbas ?”

And the multitude answered “Barabbas.”

Then from out of the Judgment Hall there came a man of a dark and evil aspect, whose savage eyes leered furtively yet sullenly about him, and upon whose bloated face there seemed to dwell the infamy of years of foulest passions, of brutal deeds, of greed, of cruelty and lust.

Amazed and saddened by their choice, and terrified by the fierce clamour, my kinsman flew back to his woodland home, but ever haunted by the sad yet tender vision of the thorn-crowned captive, he soon flew once again into the city.

Hither and thither he flew about the streets, but nowhere could he find the one he sought, until at length, wearied by his long search, he was about to fly homewards, when, just outside the city walls, he saw three crosses raised high in the air. And on the central one he beheld the form of Him he sought.

A crown of thorns was on His brow, and the pangs of a supreme agony was upon Him; but nevertheless the look of infinite forgiveness was still upon His face. Reverently the little bird drew nearer.

He was very simple and untaught, yet, nevertheless, dimly he understood that he was in the presence of a sight more marvellous than aught the world had ever seen.

Could this man be indeed, as some had mocking said, the Son of God? He could not tell. Tremblingly, and with anxious wonder, he stood still doubting, until at length across the silence broke these words :

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Then a great, great light broke in upon his heart. He knew it was the Son of God !

Nearer and nearer he drew, no longer knowing any fear of Him who in His agony could yet forgive. And as he nearer drew within the crown of thorns he saw one cruel thorn which seemed to press more sharply than the rest. He was but a small, weakly bird, but for love's sake he could be strong, and braving now even the cruel crowd, he flew straight to the cross, and with his beak he tore away the sharpest thorn.

And as he did so, upon his soft, brown breast there fell a drop of blood !

And ever since that day, upon each Christ-bird's breast, there is a crimson stain like to a stain of blood.

And when the redbreast had ended his story, a hushed silence fell upon all, and none of the birds or flowers spoke any more.

Then slowly and musingly the fair-souled maiden moved towards her dwelling, and the little redbreast nestled into her bosom ; and silently upon his crimson heart there fell a tear !

CLARE VYVIAN.





### A Western Mystery.

WE hear so much nowadays of Spiritualism and Psychical Research, that I think the following account of my short sojourn in a "haunted" house may possibly interest some of my readers.

In the winter of 188— my husband sold his ranch in Colorado, and, as we wished to remain in the neighbourhood of our old home, we began to look about for a house to suit us.

Our ranch was situated on the eastern slope of the Rockies, not far from the once successful mining camp of Copperville, and it was to this now deserted town we went house-hunting.

There was no lack of dwellings to choose from ; we inspected an endless number of frame-houses, but all proved unsuitable. At last we were directed to one that seemed from the description most desirable, and, having obtained the key, went on to look at it.

The house was a large one, built of timber, standing by itself on the prairie, about a quarter of a mile from Copperville, and enclosed in a good-sized yard by a strong fence. Its appearance was decidedly prepossessing, and the interior did not disappoint us. There was no hall ; the front door opened direct into a sitting-room, which was divided from another of the same size by folding doors. Two bedrooms opened right and left off each of these rooms, and the kitchen was quite at the back.

On opening a door in the kitchen, we were surprised to find ourselves on the top step of a ladder, which led down into a cellar, and this was the only part of the house that did not quite meet with our approval.

As I peered into the dismal, eerie-looking vault below me, I inwardly confessed I would rather not investigate it more than was necessary.

On the whole I was delighted with the house, and most anxious for Philip to take it at once.

"I think we are most lucky to get the chance of such a charming place!" I exclaimed enthusiastically. "I can't imagine how it came to be vacant so long, unless the rent is exorbitant."

"The rent's low enough," answered Philip, "only 10 dols. a month. I suppose I'd better tell you the reason the house won't let, and that is, the people round here maintain it's haunted! However, it seems no one has seen anything appalling, so I thought you wouldn't be afraid to try it."

"I don't know if we should be doing a very wise thing in coming here," I returned dubiously, "but it's almost impossible to believe in ghosts in a place like this. Look at the windows! What floods of light they let in, and you can see into every corner. It is tempting, I own, and the low rent, combined with the absence of neighbours, is a strong incentive."

"Well! please yourself," said Philip, "I leave it to you, only saying for my part that I would not hesitate one moment about it."

Finally I decided to take it, and we stopped at the agent's house on our way home. I was amused at his remarks when everything was settled.

"Wal!" he said, "now ye hev tuk it I can talk. I'll jest tell ye right now, it's harnted!"

His surprise was great when Philip told him we already knew the fact.

"Is that so?" he went on. "I wouldn't live in sich a place nohow, but I guess ye Britishers ain't so particular."

"Perhaps not," returned Philip. "I believe these ghosts, if there are any, are about as substantial as you and I are, and, if so, I daresay I shall find my 'Smith & Wesson's' of some service later on."

"Maybe so," drawled the man, "but I'm feared ye'll find it a

bit too high-toned fur ye, like the other folks did as tuk it before. They cleared out ! ”

“ Who knows ? we may too,” said Philip, smiling, and we drove away.

On the way home I recalled this conversation, and wondered if we were right in our decision.

Philip, however, seemed so set on the house, and the objection to it seemed so absurd, I banished my doubts and returned to the pleasanter thoughts of the spacious rooms and cupboards I should have at my disposal when we made the change from our small ranch-house.

I had a strong girl to help me, and she and I had hard work for the next few days, packing all our goods and chattels for removal to the new home.

At last the final waggon-load was dispatched, and we followed it to Copperville. With roaring fires in the stoves the house seemed most comfortable, and, after supper, when the two children were in bed, Philip and I sat in the back sitting-room talking and congratulating ourselves on the change we had made. It was not long before we were reminded of the bad reputation the house bore. In the middle of our conversation the kitchen door was opened abruptly, and Bessie walked in.

With true western audacity she sat down on a chair close to the stove, remarking :

“ If ye folks think I’m agoin’ to stay in that ere kitchen alone, as I did at the ranch, ye’re jest way off it. I feel kind o’ lonesome in this big lump of a house anyhow, and I guess I’ll keep along o’ ye.”

“ I believe ye’re afraid of ‘spooks’ ;\* aren’t you ? ” asked Philip.

“ I dunno,” she returned ; “ but it’s so empty, an’ ye’ve no neighbours nigh. I almost wish I hadn’t come.”

“ Nonsense ! ” I said ; “ you’re only tired after all the hard work to-day, and when you’ve had a good night’s rest you’ll feel quite different.”

We sat there until it was time to go to bed, and I let Bessie sleep in the children’s room, thinking she might feel nervous by herself.

I slept soundly and rose the next morning in good spirits,

\* Anglicé—ghosts.

which were immediately damped on entering the kitchen, as I saw from Bessie's expression that something was wrong.

"You don't look well, Bessie," I began. "Did you sleep badly?"

"I'm agoin' home to-day," she answered shortly, "I ain't agoin' to stop here another night—not even to please you."

"But I really can't spare you," I urged. "What's the matter? You mustn't get frightened and run off like this; there's so much work to be done yet."

"I know it, an' I'm put out mightily about it," she returned, "but it's no use; I dursn't bide here any more."

"What's frightened you, Bessie?" asked Philip, who came in at that moment. "Did you see an apparition? What was it like? A man with his head under his arm, or a blue-faced spook?"

"It's nothin' to laugh at," she answered crossly. "I saw nobody, but I heerd a wee baby a-cryin' that pitiful all night I couldn't sleep a wink. It war jest as if it war a-smotherin' under the bed-clothes, an' I got that skeered I kep a-jumpin' up to look at the children, but it warn't them."

Philip did his utmost to help me dissuade the girl from leaving, when he saw she was so serious over it.

He offered various suggestions as to the cause of the disturbance. Prairie dogs, a chink in the window, or a mouse in the wall, but all to no purpose; she was firm in her decision to leave.

"I've bin tole as that baby is often heerd," she concluded, "an' I doubted it, but it's gospel truth, an' I quit."

She left that afternoon, and only those who have experienced the same trouble in procuring servants out west, as I have, can understand what a loss I sustained in her. At last I got everything straight and in order.

A few days after we had taken possession, Philip was obliged to go back to our old ranch, and found it would be impossible to return for the night.

He asked me if I should be nervous at being left by myself with the children.

I assured him I did not feel in the least alarmed, and saw him drive off with a light heart.

With plenty of work to do I found the time fly, and with the

children's voices ringing through the house, I felt quite cheerful and happy. It was only after the little ones were asleep that it struck me how empty the house seemed, and I began to experience a feeling of loneliness stealing over me.

To dispel this, I got a book and sat down to read until I could feel sleepy enough for bed.

As I lay back in a comfortable arm-chair, with plenty of logs in the stove, I prepared to enjoy myself, and becoming interested in my book soon forgot my surroundings.

Suddenly my attention was arrested by peculiar noises in the cellar underneath the room in which I was sitting.

As I could only suppose someone had managed to get in there, it was with feelings of relief I recalled the fact that I had carefully fastened the door leading from the cellar into the kitchen.

I listened intently.

The sounds grew louder and louder, as if two persons were engaged in a deadly combat. From one end of the cellar to the other, I could hear the sounds of a tremendous scuffle going on.

Filled with alarm, I sat motionless. At last it seemed as if all these terrifying noises culminated in one heavy thud; then all was still!

I would have given worlds to know what was really going on, but feeling too shaky to venture down the rickety ladder I decided to retire to bed.

Once in the room with the children, my confidence returned.

I was soon asleep, but in an hour or two I awoke with a start, feeling sure I heard footsteps in the house.

A sensation of horror came over me as I could distinguish them advancing, slowly and surely, in the direction of my room, from the dining-room!

If it was a house-breaker, there was no attempt to conceal his movements.

The door was ajar, and my heart stood still with fear as I listened to the approaching footsteps, but they passed by and seemed to enter the bedroom opposite.

I lit the candle, got up, went to the door and looked out. I could see nothing, and the door of the opposite bedroom was shut.

I had not heard it close, and faint with fear I returned to bed to spend the rest of the night sleepless and anxious.

Next day Philip came home, and as I related my experience, I could see by his expression that he was longing to come face to face with my nocturnal visitor. After supper, I sat down to write letters, while my husband read a newspaper.

Presently the sounds of the night before again issued from the cellar. Strengthened by Philip's presence, I ignored them at first and went on writing, but they gradually waxed louder, until at last I looked up and saw Philip had put down his paper and was listening.

"That's the noise I heard last night," I remarked, feeling relieved to think there was a man to investigate the matter.

Philip rose abruptly, saying, "I'll take a light and have a look round those lower regions."

I came with him to the kitchen, and as I unfastened the cellar door the climax seemed to have arrived, and the noise ended with the same dull thud as on the evening before.

With a candle and a revolver, Philip made his way down the ladder, and I watched him from the top as he went to every hole and corner of the dark place. He could discover nothing, and returned baffled.

"It's very odd," he said. "I can't think what it can be ; there isn't a sign of rats or any animals down there."

"I don't think it's rats," I replied, "for we had plenty of them at the ranch, and though they made row enough, it wasn't like that."

"No, you're right," returned Philip ; "in fact, this sounds just like two people fighting, doesn't it ?"

I nodded assent ; it wasn't a pleasant idea. I had told Philip for the future I would not undertake to stay another night in the house alone, as the strain on my nerves was too great.

For a few nights we had peace, but then once more I awoke to hear the footsteps wandering about the house. I hastily shook Philip, who grumbled at being roused.

"Listen !" I whispered. "The footsteps ! Quick !"

Sure enough he heard them, for springing out of bed, he got into his clothes, and muttering, "I'll get 'em this time," he seized his loaded revolver and sallied forth on his search. I did not feel so alarmed with Philip near. He was so calm and cool, and



the very man to have in such a house. I waited quietly while he hunted every room in vain.

When he returned his face wore a puzzled look.

"It's the queerest thing on record!" he exclaimed. "I couldn't see anything although I followed those footsteps into one of the back bedrooms, and do you know, I could have sworn I heard a baby crying in this room while I was there."

"Did you?" I answered, with a sinking at my heart. "I sincerely hope I shan't hear that."

"Well, don't worry yourself about all this," said Philip, "there's a trap-door in the roof of that back bedroom, and I'll go up through it to-morrow. Probably I'll find something to account for this row."

Accordingly, next morning we made a careful survey of the cellar, loft and cupboards, but failed to discover any solution of the mystery.

As time went on, the noises became more frequent, and we often heard the rocking chairs swinging backwards and forwards in the sitting-room, off which our room opened, but on going into it, we could see nothing.

One day I had taken the children for a walk. It was a bright spring morning, and the sun was shining on the front windows. On my return I was surprised to see a Copperville man, I knew by sight, standing on the road staring fixedly at our bedroom window.

On my approach he suddenly addressed me with: "Wal, do say! Jest look at that ere winder an' remark how it's comed agin as it war three years ago!"

Utterly at a loss for his meaning, I asked stiffly:

"What's come? I don't understand you in the least."

"Ye don't catch on yit," he answered excitedly. "It's that pictur on the winder glass; they can't git rid of it nohow. It allus comes arter the house is let."

I followed his gaze and started violently, for a peculiar light brought out in the glass the outline of a skeleton standing upright, the figure of a little child kneeling at his feet with uplifted hands as if begging for mercy, and in the corner of the pane a red-coloured hand.

"How horrible!" I exclaimed with a shudder. "I see it distinctly. How extraordinary I never noticed it before."

"It comes all of a sudden like that," said the man solemnly, "an' ye'll never git it orf, Marm. To my knowledge that winder has bin tuk out an' broken up twice in the last ten years, but the same pictur comes agin."

"It must be some trick," I declared angrily, "I'll see if it can't be removed."

Philip soon joined us, and, having inspected this new feature of the mystery, announced his intention of fathoming the trickery which he also was convinced it must be. We tried every possible way to efface the unpleasant image from the window but with no success; in fact, day after day it seemed to become more distinct.

We found it exceedingly annoying for, as the news spread, people came, even from long distances, to stare at the strange sight. In desperation we sent for the agent.

"What's to be done?" demanded Philip, "we can't have these crowds swarming round the house every day to look at that piece of glass. It's most exasperating."

"I expect we'd better do wot we did last time," said the man slowly.

"Well, what was it?" asked Philip impatiently.

"Broke it up in bits an' buried it!" he returned with awe in his voice.

"All right! take the pane out and do what you like with it; only stop these fools gaping round here."

The window was promptly taken from its place, and having been smashed into pieces, was forthwith buried.

By this time I was getting decidedly unnerved, and was delighted to receive a letter from a friend who had promised to come and stay with us. She now offered to pay us a visit and I gladly agreed to her proposal.

The Sunday after her arrival, she was helping me to get our tea ready, when all at once we heard the wailing cry of a child in distress. It was very pitiful, and thinking it was some little one strayed from the town, I hurried to the front door and looked out. My friend followed me, and, as we stood gazing about, she remarked:

"How muffled it sounds, and it seems to me as if it came out of one of those bedrooms. I'll go and look."

"It's no use," I answered wearily, as the truth dawned on me,



"it must be the child's cry that everyone hears, and there's no explanation of it.

Luckily she was very fearless, and received my account so quietly of the disturbances that had occurred, that she restored my courage and we discussed the whole affair.

"Perhaps," she concluded, "these noises may be the result of some unexpiated crimes," and here the subject dropped.

My friend stayed until the long summer days drew on, and I tried to feel more contented as, although the disturbances continued, we saw no apparitions.

One evening we were all on the verandah, the front door open, a lamp close to us on a small table inside the sitting-room, and the folding-doors half closed ; still we could see plainly into the farther room. Philip was reading aloud letters from home, when suddenly we heard a heavy fall in one of the back bedrooms, followed by the now familiar footsteps coming out of the room.

In an instant Philip started from his chair and seized the lamp ; we all hurried forward through the folding doors, and to our horror, the footsteps passed steadily across the room as we stood in it, but without any appearance to account for them. Completely mystified, we followed them into the opposite bedroom, which was empty. We looked all around it and peered into a large cupboard in vain, and had to return discomfited to the sitting-room, when we looked blankly in each other's faces.

Even Philip, always so ready with explanations, had none to offer now, and as for my friend and myself, we nearly collapsed with fear, and it was not without a strong mental effort that we summoned up enough courage to go to bed. The remainder of that night passed undisturbed, and the next day my friend returned home.

Before going, she begged us to leave the place, saying :

"I'm not nervous by nature; but I feel a horror over me all the time I'm here, as if something terrible was going to happen. I can't get rid of the feeling, and I urge you to give notice. There's something uncanny in the whole place, and I can't bear to think of your staying on."

Philip seemed impressed by her manner, and, as I was decidedly of her opinion, he promised to look out for another home for us. After this, things got worse ; the children often

woke up in the night crying and saying they were frightened, until I could stand it no longer, and at last persuaded Philip to go and give notice.

Finding it impossible to get another house to suit us, he proposed we should camp in the mountains for a couple of months.

I gladly agreed to his proposal, being ready to go anywhere out of such a hateful house, so we began our preparations for another move.

My father came on a visit from England a day or two before we left, and as we were quitting the place so soon, I thought it better not to tell him of our unpleasant experiences. I had engaged a girl to cook for us in the camp, and with the greatest difficulty had induced her to come for one night to the house.

We were in a great upset turning out next day, and Philip, having stored our furniture in the town, had driven off to the camp to pitch the tents, dig trenches, and make ready for our arrival.

We went early to bed and were soon asleep, but about midnight I was awakened by a great commotion. In a few seconds my new girl burst into the room in a state of mind bordering on hysterics.

"I'm skeered to fits," she sobbed out. "I never heerd sich a row. Thar's men a-fightin' in the cellar I can swear; I could heer 'em a-goin' on drefful."

I quieted her as well as I could, but she was perfectly terrified. She declared she heard something drop heavily from the trap-door in the ceiling of her room, and then footsteps moving across the floor.

"It war bright moonlight," she went on, "an' yit I could see nothin', but when I heerd it a-makin' right fur me, I couldn't stand it no longer."

It was no use trying to persuade her to go back.

"Not I," she said. "I ain't a-goin' back thar agin to-night; I guess I'll sleep on the floor in here an' jest roll mysel' in a rug." She suited the action to the word, and wrapping herself in a travelling-rug, lay on the hard floor and slept comfortably till morning.

In the course of conversation at breakfast, my father asked "What was all the noise about last night? I thought I heard a child crying a great deal."

"It was Mary disturbed you," I answered. "She was alarmed at something she heard and came to my room."

"Well! I'm sure I don't wonder at it," returned my father, "if it was what awoke me. At first I thought I heard something like a fight going on somewhere in the back of the house, and then the continual wailing of a child! I was afraid one of the children was ill."

As the only explanation I could offer, I forthwith related to him our ghastly experiences, and added how thankful I felt to be leaving the horrible place that day.

"Nothing in the world shall ever induce me to enter those doors again!" I exclaimed as we drove away from the haunted house, and my spirits rose high as we left it far behind.

The out-door life in camp was a pleasant change, and we were rapidly forgetting our late miseries, when they were recalled to our minds by a visit from an old miner who was prospecting on the range. He arrived one evening at the camp and asked leave to stay all night.

We consented, and after supper we sat round the piled-up log fire talking to him. Knowing he had been many years in the valley, we asked him if he knew anything about the haunted house we had vacated.

"Wal!" said the old fellow, "I'm one o' the old timers in this valley, an' know every cabin an' house that's bin built. It's my opinion, if spooks appear after bad deeds hef tuk place that yon house must be over-stocked with 'em."

I was wild with curiosity, and exclaimed, "If you know anything of its past history, I wish you'd tell us. It might give us some clue to the extraordinary noises we heard."

"Maybe I can," he said slowly. "It's eighteen years ago sin Edwards fust struck the horn-silver as made Copperville boom, an' I was one o' the fust as rushed to the valley. Ye never seed sich a wild place; 'twar only fit fur Injuns an' Coyotes, but I guess we made things hum up different. That house ye've quit war the fust buildin' to go up; 'twar a kind o' boardin' house an' gamblin' hell. Them war high old days! I've seed the boys, when they'd struck it rich, a-pitchin' dollars right an' left in the street, an' gamblin' night an' day in that very house. Many an' many a fight has tuk place thar, an' I remember one time, two men were fightin' over a minin' claim until the boys

got tired o' hearin' 'em squabble, so one night they got 'em mad an' then shut 'em into the big cellar, armed with bowie knives, to finish it out, and Gee Whiz! they did it. I came to the house in the midst of it, an' it nigh lifted my hair to hear the row a-goin' on below. They fought like demons, an' as we listened I knowed it meant death to one on 'em. 'Boys,' sez I, 'let's make 'em quit this foolin', it's gettin' desperate.' Jest then there comed a thumpin' noise, an' we made a rush for the cellar door. I hurried down the ladder with the rest o' the outfit, an' as I reached the bottom I heerd a kind o' rattle, which tole me plain as we war too late. They war dead as door-nails! They'd hacked each other nearly to pieces, an' died with their hands clutchin' each other's throats! 'Twar the orfullest sight I ever seed out west, an' I ain't no tenderfoot. I reckon the boys war shamed at havin' urged 'em on, fur they helped to bury 'em very quiet-like on the prairie close by. Folks do say that when anyone takes that house they hear 'em fightin' agin. Did ye hear 'em?" he concluded.

"We certainly heard inexplicable sounds from the cellar uncommonly like what you have just described," I answered, "and also the melancholy wail of a child. Have you heard of any tragedy connected with that?"

"No," returned the miner, "I left here fur a few years, an' never heered nothin' o' this place, but I guess that winder pictur, that ye must hev seen, has summat to do with the child's cryin', an' I'd bet my bottom dollar thar's bin some devilment at work to cause it. Maybe a wee babby murdered in them walls an' buried in the yard! *Quien sabe?*\* That durned place earned a bad name an' ain't a-goin' to lose it seemingly. Take my advice an' don't go foolin' in a harnted house agin. It don't pay, honest Injun, it don't!"

I agreed with the old miner, for my health and spirits had suffered severely during our residence at Copperville, and even Philip owned it had not proved a successful venture.

I never saw the house again, and we afterwards left the neighbourhood. I hear, however, it is still unlet and likely to remain so.

I have given the facts, and I can offer no solution of the mystery beyond the old miner's explanation!

M. B. C.

\* Anglicé, "who knows?"

## A New Galatea.

### I.

I MET her first at the Verekers'. We had been talking about her before she came. Her advent was expected with a certain amount of interest—it was an event even at the Verekers', where one was always meeting curious people, more or less.

Miss Marchmont was the latest of Mr. Vereker's discoveries—it was always he who first made the acquaintances, leaving his wife to ratify the friendship later on.

Mr. Vereker was the apostle of the Theosophists, and went about the world gathering up the people whom he found to be in affinity with his ideas. His wife had a strangely worn and impassive expression, but she never failed to welcome his friends.

Bhuddism was a favourite topic at the Verekers', and such words as Karma and Nirvana came trippingly off the tongue. But on the evening I refer to a touch of human interest mingled with the talk, like a thread of crimson in a neutral-tinted strand. The name of Miss Marchmont kept recurring in the conversation, no matter what subject was started, I heard that she was singularly mediumistic, that her spiritual vision was so keen that she could distinguish the colour of the aura which (so the Theosophists say) emanates from every human being, shewing the degree of progress to which the soul has attained. I heard that she was an orphan, and, newly possessed of enormous wealth, was going to dedicate it all to the foundation of a kind of retreat for the study of the Occult, where, with a few chosen companions, she intended retiring from the world.

"I met her by a perfect chance," said Mr. Vereker, speaking in an undertone to a select circle of friends, "but I soon found out how much interest she took in spiritual topics. She was brought up by an uncle—a strange old man—a free-thinker I believe. She is singularly mediumistic—I never met a person with a more spiritual temperament. But I think she is scarcely conscious of her power, and, personally, I fancy she would do

better to mix amongst her kindred spirits than to bury herself in a nunnery."

The listeners all made some inarticulate expression of approval—it was only a murmur, but they murmured the right thing. For myself I thought the whole thing very foolish, and I did not know what to say. It is always so difficult to know what to say when one gets out of one's own set. I leant my elbow on the table and looked wearily towards the door. The room was very quiet, and the people were talking in cosy groups, all evidently interested in the same subjects. A Bhuddist priest was receiving many adoring glances from a knot of strange-looking women, most of them with untidy hair and somewhat receding chins. An Italian lady, in a strange dress covered with beetles' wings, was telling a dazed-looking clergyman that she had no home nor nation now, but belonged to the world at large. A pretty American, in a diaphanous gown and a *pince-nez*, was telling a rather good-looking Englishman that he would have to be re-incarnated many times before his spirit would attain perfection.

To me it all seemed idle talk, and I had little thought about Miss Marchmont except that she would be perhaps a shade more interesting than the rest. Even as I was thinking this I lifted up my eyes and I saw her.

She came in very slowly, with a quiet, stately tread. She wore a dark velvet gown, which changed colour as she moved, and was purple in the shadow but crimson in the light. Her luxuriant hair was gathered into a thick coil above her square, white forehead, low and broad, as we see it in the statues of the Clytie. The whole look was like a statue, and she seemed rather like a dream than a woman.

When a woman has become a serious factor in one's life, it is always a little difficult to recall in later life the impression which she made on us at first. But I think I can remember exactly how she looked as she came forward into the light, and that what struck me most was the expression of her face. It was almost a colourless face, depending for its beauty on its harmony of line. The eyes were large and clear, the features strong and beautifully cut, the lower part of the face somewhat square. But there was an absence of life in the expression—it was the face of a woman who had never loved. She came for-



ward slowly, and without embarrassment, and was at once the centre of an admiring throng. When the crowd parted a little I saw she had seated herself in a large Elizabethan chair, whose high oak back threw up her white features to perfection. What a noble head it was! And how exquisitely poised on the pillar of a throat! I felt no desire to speak to her—I seemed to wish to do nothing but watch her, and to note the harmonious lines of her mouth as her lips parted to speak.

Behind her in the shadow was another figure, which I had not noticed until now. A little witch-like woman with a sallow face and piercing eyes, who stood at the back of the chair leaning upon a cane. She seemed quite accustomed to play a secondary part, and noticed the admiration Miss Marchmont received with eyes of satisfaction.

“My great friend, Miss Gualès,” Miss Marchmont was saying as I listened to her. “I knew you would not mind my bringing her. I never go anywhere without her.”

Mr. Vereker moved forward with many protestations of delight—all received very calmly by my goddess, whilst the little lame woman’s piercing eyes seemed to look him through and through.

The talk gradually crept through many curious channels till it reached the subject of reading character from the face. There was present in the room a professional physiognomist, a woman who undertook to read the character at a glance. She was solicited to exhibit her skill for the amusement of the company, and one by one the guests would draw near her in the firelight, and she would read their faces as though it were a written page.

Miss Marchmont listened with a curious gaze, but never spoke. Sometimes she shook her head and parted her lips as though to speak, sometimes she nodded slightly as though in acquiescence. But when my character was told, she listened more intently than before, and quite at the end she said to the face-reader :

“Yes. All that you have said is quite true!”

The voice startled me. She had never seen me before—how could she tell if my character had been rightly read or no?

“My dear St. George,” said Vereker, “you are startled at what Miss Marchmont has said. These things are not wonderful to Theosophists—we recognise the power of intuition.

Miss Marchmont, I am sure, can read faces like a book—not from set theories like those of our fair friend here, but from some uncontrollable instinct of which she hardly realizes the meaning. But come, I will introduce you as a sceptic, and perhaps she will find you a more willing convert than I have done.”

Brought forward towards her, I found her looking at me with somewhat troubled gaze. The face-reader had commenced upon her next victim, and the others had gathered round to listen, it seemed for the moment as though we were alone.

“I ought not to have said that,” she said softly. “I hate to make a parade of these things. I got interested in what she was saying, and I spoke before I thought.”

“Do you mean that you read character like a book?” I asked. “Can we keep no secrets from your eyes?”

She turned away a little uneasily, and presently looked up at me with her usual serene expression.

“It is a gift which comes and goes,” she said; “but they tell me I have a kind of second-sight. Some faces are no more than blank walls—let us say like the back of a book in a book-case; but others are as clear as print—it is like reading from a printed page.”

“And you understand their minds when you look at them?”

“Oh, yes, and more than that! I can tell what troubles they have been through. But it is not the same with all—and it is a gift which comes and goes.”

She paused a little, and then went on:

“The little physiognomist is clever, but she makes mistakes all the same. It was so strange to hear her doing by rule what I do only from instinct. And sometimes I felt I must speak, but I ought not to have done it all the same.”

Whilst she talked her face grew serious again, and subsided into its accustomed calm. Her calmness made me feel irritated, and I had an unreasonable desire to make her look troubled again. It had been such a momentary look of trouble, but it had made her look so much more beautiful. I have seen the same thing by the sea at night-time when a wave has broken the reflection of the moon.



## II.

AFTER that I saw her very often, though I can scarcely tell how it came about. I was admitted to the precincts of the White House, though she was supposed to receive no visitors. I knew all of her life that she would tell me, and all of her soul that she would let me know. But I could not touch her heart, and went away always with a vague sense of discontent.

Our talk was nearly always of spiritual things, for they seemed the only topics she cared for. She had been wont to talk of serious subjects with the old philosopher with whom her girlhood had been spent, and she was glad to revive these recollections. But he had studied the spiritualistic theories in order to refute them, whilst she had found in them the interest of her life.

When the spring-time came we would often sit on the terrace looking out on the old green garden, whilst a background of some flowering plants made a halo for her head. She might have been a Madonna, with grave eyes and dove-like face, or a white-robed Diana, seated on her woodland throne. I was sick at heart as I looked at her, for I knew that my wooing was in vain. But her friendship was better than nothing—the crust which keeps the beggar alive, instead of the longed-for meal—and I was glad she was content to talk with me, honouring me with an intimacy which she granted to no one else. I believe my lonely life stirred her sympathy a little, and she was content that I should come now and again with a book or a paper which might interest her, or start her in some new train of thought. For myself, I was a thorough sceptic, and cared for nothing but the hardest facts, but I pursued many a fanciful study for the sake of my adored lady, and would hunt up old tales of folk-lore or astrology because the subjects interested her.

One evening she was talking of her favourite subject, the transmigration of souls. She spoke of the limits of our power, and how our souls were chained down by our bodies.

“They tell us there is an astral body,” she said, “and that did we realize our power we might fly away from our earthly body

like a bird from its cage. The ills of the flesh would be nothing to us, distance would have no power to bind us, and were any one we loved sick or sorry, in an instant we should stand by his side. Think of the hearts which pine in loneliness, think of the weakly souls which have no power to resist temptation—think of the noble errands these astral bodies might perform—if only we knew the way ! ”

Her voice had risen gradually as she spoke, then it suddenly drooped and fell ; her cheek had gained colour, and her eyes looked far off, as though she were speaking to herself instead of to me. But seeing I said nothing she looked at me, and with something of appeal in her eyes.

“ Men have appeared to one another in the moment of death—often has a spirit taken form at such a moment for the sake of saying farewell to a friend. Then why not in life when it is helpful ? Everything can be done by the power of will.”

She paused and looked at me again, this time with more appeal in her eyes.

“ No. Everything cannot be done by the power of will. Else you would have loved me long ago.”

The words broke from me like a despairing cry, and I seized her hands and looked into her face. I was dizzy and disturbed with the revelation I had made, sick with fear now that I had spoken at last.

She turned suddenly white, and wrenched her hands away, catching hold of the side of the window to support herself.

“ Go ! ” she said gently. “ Love is not for me. I never dreamt that you felt anything like this. I shall never love. I have taken a vow. I will have no common-place life, such as that by which so many women grow forgetful of the divine. I have already chosen my path, and I must tread it alone.”

“ Ah, you do not care for me, or for the loneliness you condemn me to ! You do not think of me at all ! I wish I had never seen you ; for then I should not have known what life might have been for me ! ”

My passionate words fell wildly from my lips, I hardly knew what I said. I turned to look at her. She had turned deadly white, yet she preserved always her calm voice and expression like a mother soothing a child.

“ Hush,” she said, “ it is so useless. You disturb yourself and

me. Go now, I cannot speak to you to-night. It distresses me too much. To-morrow I shall be calmer again."

This was her last word, and even as she spoke the little Gotalès came in, looking as though she guessed something was wrong. I took leave in haste, fearing that the witch-like woman should see the emotion in my face. And my heart was full of despair, for I felt that I had poured out my soul at the feet of my love, and that it had all been in vain.

---

### III.

I HAD no sleep that night, but passed the time in miserable thoughts. At one moment I blamed myself for having been too precipitate, at another for not having spoken before. What if I had shewn myself her lover from the first, instead of letting her grow so accustomed to consider me as a friend that perhaps now she could think of me in no other way? A hundred thoughts conflicted in my brain, and I could see no way out of my distress. I seemed like one who throws himself against an iron gate and cannot get it open, but succeeds in wounding himself against the bars. When the morning came I had determined that I would think of Miss Marchmont no more, yet my mind was occupied constantly with the thought of how I could meet her. I could not go to her house again whilst matters were as they were. I could not force myself upon her, and I did not want to meet her with her friend. She had invited me to her box at the opera that night, but that was before I had spoken — now it would not be right for me to go. I resolved not to see her or speak of her, to exert a strong effort and to put her out of my life. Yet in the afternoon I went to the Verekers' for the one reason that I might speak of her, and I found myself constantly looking at the door where I had first seen her come in.

Mrs. Vereker was at home, and her impassive manner was a contrast to the agitation which reigned in my heart. The talk soon drifted in the direction of Miss Marchmont, and I asked the question which disturbed me as though I did it from idle curiosity.

"Do I think she will ever marry?" said Mrs. Vereker. "Oh, never, whilst Miss Gotalès is with her."

"Miss Gualès is only her dependent. She has no influence with her surely?"

"Oh, but I think she has. She is devoted to all the same topics, and she seems to have great power over Miss Marchmont. And she is fearfully jealous of her—she will like the idea of this retreat, because it will take Miss Marchmont away from the world. It is nearly finished, you know, that retreat," she went on placidly, "and we shall soon see no more of our interesting friend. She meant to have gone to it in the summer, but I heard from her to-day that she will go into it sooner than she had thought."

I went away from the house, more wretched than when I had entered it. I walked to my rooms feeling more sad at every step. Suddenly a resolve came to me. I must make an effort to see her as she was going away so soon. I would go to her box at the opera—it would be less difficult than going to the house. It was just a chance of seeing her, and if she were angry I could but go.

"Miss Marchmont has not come yet," said the attendant, "but I think you know the box."

I went up to the box and waited, feeling more lonely if possible than before. It was early, the house was half-lighted—the sounds that ran through the orchestra seemed like a soul in pain. I began to dread her coming, lest she should be angry. Yet I felt utterly wretched as I saw the house filling up, and I fancied I was the only person alone. The time went by, she did not come, I began to be sick at heart. The overture was like a sea of sound which buzzed in my ears, I felt I should be drowned in the waves. The opera commenced; great crashes of melody, great crowds coming and going; the curtain was going down, the people were applauding; the sights and the sounds dazzled me, my heart felt like lead. Going away so soon, and I might never see her again! And then it suddenly seemed as if my longing became a power, that my desire was like a heavy cord that must bring her to me even against her will. I called all the strength of my will to draw her to that spot, and so full of it was I that I was scarcely surprised when the door opened and I turned and found her at my side.

"I think you have drawn me," she said gently, her voice

sounding as though she spoke in a dream. "I felt you wanted to see me very much. Is it so?"

She turned her gaze on me, I put out my hand, and as we sat in the shadow of the box, she put her hand in mine. All my troubles vanished as though an angel had come to me—the world was not wretched any more—my heart was full of peace, only that I felt I could not be sufficiently happy in the moments as they passed. I would have given a life-time full of commonplace cares and joys for the sake of extending those precious hours which were rich with the comfort of her presence.

I had no grief any more, except that I feared to realize my joy. I felt like one who has been trying for months to tame a timid bird, and then dares not breathe when it comes to him for fear it should fly away. My love was here and would listen to me. She was gracious and gentle beyond belief. We were very quiet, we scarcely spoke. Yet we understood one another's hearts, and scarcely felt the need for speech. Her eyes were illumined with a tender light, her face was all softness, her voice like the cooing of a dove. The iron gate was closed no longer, the statue had come to life.

The music went on, it was like a dream, I trembled lest I should suddenly awake.

"You will never go back to yesterday again? You will be always as you are now?"

"Alas! I cannot go back," she cried. "I must always love you now."

Even as she said these words she rose, drew her cloak closely round her, and prepared to depart. I rose to follow her, but she waved me back.

"To-morrow," she said softly, looking over her shoulder, and was gone.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next day found me early at the portals of the White House, and I strode eagerly past the servant who let me in.

"Miss Marchmont is at home, sir," he said, stopping me, "but I don't know if she can see you—she was very unwell last night."

I smiled, thinking I knew better, but waited for a while at his request.

"Miss Marchmont will see you, sir," he said, coming back, and he showed me into the morning-room.

It was a warm day in April, but there was a fire lighted in the grate, and Miss Marchmont was lying on a big white sofa near the fire, but raised herself as I came in. She looked weak and worn, and also a little perplexed.

"You have come early," she commenced, slowly rising into a sitting posture—a study in white, in her thick white morning gown against a back-ground of soft, white furs.

"Yes, early, love. How could I stay away? I could not sleep last night—I lay awake thinking of you. How could I stay away?"

She looked at me coldly, like one in a dream.

"I have given you no right to speak to me like that."

"No right? Oh, my love, do not say you have frozen to me again. Were you not thinking of me—expecting me? How could I stay away after last night?"

"Last night!" she echoed, staring at me with parted lips. "Last night? What do you mean? I did not see you then. I could not go to the opera, I was ill."

"But you were there," I cried. "I saw you—spoke to you!"

Miss Marchmont looked at me as though I were mad.

"Esther!" she cried, and as she spoke Esther Gualès came from an inner room. "Esther! Tell Mr. St. George what I was doing last night."

The little lame woman, with the eager eyes, came limping into the room on her crutch, and paused a moment before she made her reply.

"Last night," she said; "ah, it was terrible last night. I'll tell you about it, Mr. St. George. All last night she lay in a trance. We were to have gone to the opera, but did not. I have often seen her in a trance before, and always been able to rouse her from them myself. But this trance was beyond me. I waited with her from eight till twelve, and she was insensible till then."

She passed away through the long window into the garden and was gone. Miss Marchmont went to the window, and cried "Stay!" but the little lame woman was gone. Then she stood some time by the window, looking out, and I watched the folds of her loose white dress and the soft curves of her hair.



Suddenly she turned round, as by an uncontrollable impulse, and came quite close to me.

"Tell me," she said in a whisper, "what did I do last night?"

I answered, breathing quickly. "You cared for me. You came to the box at the opera, where I had waited a long time. I had longed for you greatly. I willed it with all my power. You came in slowly; you said that I had drawn you. You put your hand in mine, and I seemed as though I did not need to tell you how I loved you—you seemed to know all that I would say. And when we parted I said, 'Will you love me always?' Do you remember how you answered? You said, 'Oh, I must love you always—I can never forget you now.'"

My voice rose higher as I went on. I took a step towards her, and tried to take her in my arms. But she melted from me like a snow-wreath and buried her face in her hands, and I saw through her white fingers that a blush like the lining of a sea-shell had overspread her face.

"Oh, indeed! This was not I!" she cried. "I did not know I went. This was my astral body—you drew it forth from me. This is the soul's freedom I have hankered for so long, and did I use it thus?"

Then she lifted her face from her hands, and it was stern and pale once more.

"Much watching, fasting, study and prayer have been spent ere I reached to this. And must I have made my first journey from the body for such a cause as this? To fill an idle hour with thoughts of love, to come to you merely because you had a desire to see me—you, a sceptic, who scarcely care for these things at all? Alas! I am not fit for my vocation if I fall away like this! Oh, leave me free! You drag me down—you drag me down."

"Nella!" I cried, using her name for the first time, "You blaspheme against love. It is the highest thing on earth, that which has had power to draw you, and you will not own it, even whilst you feel its power. Lonely all my life, you are the only woman that has charmed me. I cannot live without you now, my life is wrapped up in yours."

"Hush!" she said feebly. "Love is not for me. Alas! I might have loved you once—perhaps I do even now. You can draw my soul out of my body—I am not my own any

more. But I have vowed not to love, but to finish what I have begun. The soul which loves looks earthwards, and may not get free from its chains. Ah, do not love me," she cried, "Your love drags me down. Cease to care for me—do not hinder my flight. To-morrow I enter my retreat—I and Miss Gotalès alone. See, I am like a bird that has got free, do not put me back into my cage!"

So she spoke and controlled me, and I stood miserable, not knowing what to say. She paced the room much agitated, and paused before me again.

"Promise me," she said, "before we part. Promise me you will not exert your power over me again. Do not wish for me, do not will me to come—have pity on me, for I am weaker than I thought. It is the only thing you can do for me. Promise me this, for love of me."

Her voice sank to a murmur. Her head sank on her breast. She raised her eyes and looked at me, and I seemed to gain strength from her gaze.

"Love," I said, "go, if you are happier. I will do as you ask me. But my life will be like death. If I thought death would come quickly, I would thank God for it, as the only good gift He had left.

So saying, I turned to depart, and she stood looking at me across the threshold, as though she were turned to stone. This was the last I saw of my dear lady, whom I loved better than my life. I walked down the garden-path, feeling as if I were stunned, like a man who has had a heavy blow. The dark face of the little Gotalès watched me from the window, glad to see me go. But her triumph did not hurt me, even as a pin-prick does not hurt a man when he has just been stabbed to the heart. So I went away out of my lady's life, and I have not been a hindrance in her path. But a bitter joy remains to me, knowing I might call her if I would. Perhaps in the hour of my death, her spirit will come to me, but I will not call her till then.

LUCIE H. ARMSTRONG.





## The Crimson Poppies.

### A LEGEND OF LIFE.

“ Long days of Desire, and brief Dreams of Delight,  
They are mine when Poppy-Land cometh in sight.”

AMIDST the cheerless gloom of a bleak, bare, Paris garret an Artist sat alone.

The room, high up beneath the zinc roofs of the city, was very dark and desolate. The wretched charcoal fire had long since died out in the grate, and the chilly winter's wind blew drearily in through the cracked panes of the lattice. Before him lay a few half-finished sketches. But the Artist was not painting. His heart was too heavy for that. He leant his head upon his hand, and motionless and mute he gazed with a kind of weary stupor on his unfinished work.

His canvases were covered with shapes of shadowy meaning. Visions of things strange, weird, fantastical at times—yet beautiful always. Beautiful as the creations of that supreme genius alone can be which turns all that it touches into pure forms of deathless loveliness. Things of Life and things of Death. The sunlight shining upon the golden curls of little children—the moonlight casting its pallid shadows above the unholy darkness of some city dead-house. The maiden dreaming amidst the fairness of white folded lilies. The murderer cursing the hellish phantoms of his convict-cell! All things that this man wrought were great—great through the passion and the pathos which dwells within all human life, and which must also dwell within all Art predestined unto immortality.

Great! and yet—yet, he starved here in a garret!

The son of Breton parents, he had been reared beneath the pale, grey skies, and amidst the green, level pasture-lands of

Northern France. As a lad, he had always been cold, silent, still ; unseeking of the sympathy, indifferent either to the joys or cares of those about him, and asking but this one thing alone of Life or Fate—peace to pursue in his own manner those burning wonder-dreams of art which lay within him.

To his parents, who had dwelt all their lives content within their little poplar-shadowed homestead, this chilly apathy towards all more trivial interests, this glowing, deep art-passion which consumed their son's whole being, seemed as a thing incomprehensible, terrible ! His father, a man of nature stern and unyielding and narrowed in by all a yeoman's hard, relentless bigotries, deemed that an artist's life held naught saving a mass of useless dreams, or vicious vagrancy. His mother too, although a gentler soul, sorely condemned this strange, strong love of Art, fearing lest it should prove some deep-laid devil's snare to lure her son's steps downward into paths of Death and Hell.

But by his father's upbraidings, even as by his mother's tears, the lad had remained unmoved. They might fetter and hinder, yet could they not deter him, for a force which was greater than they was at work within him.

Had he been less strong, less cold and less enduring, he long ago would have been daunted, since all things seemed combined together against him ! His means were few—so few that only rarely could he purchase even the very crudest chinks, or roughest tablets, for his work. He had no guide to aid or to advise him. And even the land in which he dwelt, monotonous and oft mist-shrouded as it was, held none of the vivid picture-tints which gleam through the radiant glow of the sun-kissed South, or through the frozen fairness of the snow-clad North !

Yet, to the artist's eye, wherever Nature is—is beauty !

And thus it was with him. In the fleeting rose of the rainbow, in the pale amber light of the moon. From the ripple of wood-fed streams. In the white of spring-born snowdrops—in the scarlet of autumn poppies—through all these things the spirit of art and the spirit of beauty breathed. Her soul into his soul. Her life into his life, till through her myriad Nature-echoes seemed to ring out one everlasting voice, which called to him, bidding him to rise—to rise and to achieve !

To achieve—what ?

Alas! so little! He, whose Art-dreams were utterly condemned by all about him! He, whose life's days were all consumed amidst the dreary drudgery of that perpetual and mechanical hand-labour, which was what his father so sternly exacted from him. How—wearied in body, and untaught in mind—how should he achieve aught?

Yet what he could do—that he did. And his clear mind, untrained, yet vigorous and virile, nurtured itself in silence upon the marvels and the mysteries of that vast Nature-World which spread itself around him.

Many a morning would he rise ere daybreak to steal a few glad hours of freedom before the day's long drudgery of work began; and wandering through the soft lights of the rose-coloured dawn, would study all the glories of the awakening day. Would gaze absorbed upon the snowy fairness of the unfolding, dew-drenched Lilies, or stand with silent lips and dreaming eyes amidst the flashing, regal crimson of the tall red Poppy-flowers.

To one of his temperament—cold, callous, still, and filled with a scorn half-bitter, and half-chill, for all the material weaknesses and sordid earth-bound aims of those about him—for such an one, the Poppies held some spell of weird, impenetrable charm, as standing tall and motionless, with blood-red heads uplifted towards the sun, they seemed to him to be the very incarnation of a strength cruel perhaps, yet passionless. A strength which seeks one life, one sun alone, and seems to mock all feebler, frailer things. And thus it came, that in a way he held the Poppies dear, and loved to mingle their burning, brilliant radiance with his works better, far better, than either the virginal grace of the white Star-lilies, or the pale tender tints of the soft wood-flowers!

And so the years—the long, long years of cramped monotonous toil, the few rare hours of sweet achievement, passed, until the time came, when, with the death of both his parents he found himself for the first time free—free to follow the Art he loved.

So he sold the quiet Breton homestead, and with the little gold it brought, he took his way to Paris.

There he toiled patiently and unremittingly; sparing himself no effort however arduous, no labour however toilsome, which

might serve to aid him in his work. But the slight heritage, which had been plentitude amidst the pastoral Breton corn-lands, had swiftly become penury amidst the pressing poverties and daily needs of life in a great city. And holding neither friends nor fame, he had had no power to make men heed, and thus, one by one, he had seen all his pictures rejected by the great Art-dealers, and the works of men with more interest, but infinitely less talent, accepted in their stead.

He had made a long, long fight. But the slow agony of dreary poverty, of constant defeat, and of unending failure at length had vanquished him. And to-day, as he sat alone in his desolate garret and mused over his vanished hopes, his heart had grown heavy and bitter within him.

"What use!" he murmured wearily. "What use to labour and to strive! No one heeds! No one cares! I dream of Fame, and I starve here in a garret, and my canvases will but be devoured by the rats, or serve for fuel for some pauper's stove. Surely it were wiser to make an end at once—many others have done so before!" And he thought of the dark, swift-flowing river, and of all the untold histories of human woe, and of life-weariness which lay deep hidden within its silent depths. And as he thought, a great longing to be swept out for ever from all this feverish misery of existence, rushed over him—Yes, he would do as those others had done—why not!

Why not!

One passion only consumed him, and left him no respite, nor thought, nor care for any other thing! A passion pure as snow in its sublimity, yet fierce as fire in its intensity. The passion for a deathless Fame—not for himself but for his works!

For himself he cared nothing! He desired not wealth, nor happiness, nor temporal ease. The kisses of women. The streams of gold—the delirium of the senses, the rapture of the desires—all these things had no more power to tempt or to allure him than bodily ills, or physical privations had power to daunt or to unnerve him. Yet cold and callous to all else, on one sole point he yet was vulnerable—this was his deep love for his Art.

He could think of Death for himself with a certain cynical indifference. The old faiths he had learnt as a child had long since died out of his heart. And since in the creative power which he possessed none were found to believe, what cared he for the mere frail, flickering physical life which lingered yet within his veins.

He rose impatiently from his seat and moved swiftly towards the doorway. But on the threshold his glance fell once again upon his canvases. He paused—even as they do who know the hour has come to take an everlasting farewell of a thing unutterably dear. And for the first time, the tears, which neither famine, nor privation, nor destitution could have wrung from him—rushed into his eyes. His fingers clenched themselves together. The shudder of a great agony shook his frame. He bent his head; his lips moved. Was it prayer? Who could say! Not prayer, perhaps, such as the meek-eyed penitents pray before their altars. Yet the fierce agony of a strong soul crying unto the very Heaven it has abjured—crying for immortality, not for itself—but for its works!

“Oh, God!” he cried. “If God there be, in Earth or Heaven, hear Thou my prayer! Do with me as Thou wilt. Let me be for ever nameless, loveless, despised, forgotten amongst men—only let these things live. Let *them* be great! Let *them* be honoured! Let *them* be Immortal and Imperishable throughout all ages that shall run!”

The Artist's voice sank into silence. The dull grey shadows came and went upon the garret wall. Outside, the chill shroud of the winter's dusk was falling, and dimly from beneath the attic casement came the dull roar of the Paris streets. Once above the tumult a woman's voice rose, singing the refrain of an old, old ballad. She was but a daughter of the populace; untrained, untaught, and singing to earn a few sous on the public roadways. Yet half-unconsciously the Artist paused and listened. For in the melody she sang, he recognised an old familiar Breton Reaper's chant. A song half-weird, half-mournful in its rhythm, which tells of how amidst the smiling fields of golden grain all ripening in the sun for man's fair food, may ever here and there, like serpents' scarlet tongues, be found the blossoms of those strange, sad, blood-red Poppy-flowers whose only gifts to men are these—Desires, Dreams, Death!

And as he heard, a smile fleeting, yet bitter, came upon the artist's lips for these three things, Desires—Dreams—Death! the sad symbols of red Poppy-Land, seemed unto him to be as three everlasting emblems of all human life, all human strife.

Then, as he mused, innumerable dreams, vague, dim, yet beautiful, began to shape themselves within his brain. Visions of things unseen, yet felt, took shape within his heart, whilst through the whole deep current of his being swept the creative passion-wave of that great longing to achieve—that deathless desire, half pain, half victory, the artist feels for ever, and which is at once his Paradise, and his Gehenna.

Absorbed in one impassioned Dream of Art, all memory of all present poverties and ills passed from his heart, and drawing his colours—the last he had!—swiftly towards him he rapidly began to paint.

Beneath his hand grew the fierce flush of a vast Poppy-covered plain. Poppies the Flowers of Dreams! Poppies the Flowers of Desires! Poppies the Flowers of Death!—everywhere Poppies.

And through the flush of the blood-red flowers there moved a mighty mass of men and women. Side by side in one unending, ceaseless throng, this vast procession swept. And as they went, upon their garments came the dark stains of the blood-red Flowers.

Some were more deeply stained than others; yet not one amongst them was wholly unsullied. Here passed the murderer with the accursèd brand of Cain upon his sullen brow, and all his garments blood-red as the dark, deep-petalled Poppy-heads. And at his side there walked the grave philosopher, with thoughtful gaze far-fixed upon the distant cloud-line; yet with feet all stained with the red juices of the flowers of dreams. Here reeled the drunken profligate fresh from the riot of some hellish orgie, with hands wildly outstretched to seize the blood-red flowers. And near him moved a pale, sad monk with scar of scourge and stripe upon his wasted flesh—yet eyes which gazed with lingering longing on the scarlet flowers. Here passed a red-lipped, star-eyed daughter of the East, whose dusky, deep-hued beauty gleamed from beneath its crimson Poppy-wreath, fierce as the flame-like rays of her own Eastern suns. And slowly near her footsteps moved a white-clad maiden. Fair was she, with the serene, still, white and golden beauty of the North, and with



soft, gentle eyes within whose dreaming azure depths no shadows seemed to linger—yet even against her white breast was pressed one tiny blood-red Poppy-bud whose crimson juices trickled slowly down her fair white garments. And all among this strange, vast, seething crowd of manhood, and of womanhood, bore stamped upon them the impress of one of those deadly passions, or those vain desires, in whose pursuit the lives of half humanity are spent. And all of them pressed onwards—onwards, beneath the fierce, unshadowed heat of the broad noon-tide sun—onwards, to where in the far distance gleamed the black waters of a deep, swift-flowing stream upon whose further shore there lay a dim, mysterious Shadow-land enshrouded in the deep unfathomable darkness of an impenetrable starless night.

There was a certain cruelty, even amidst the strong, voluptuous colouring of this picture. The cruelty of one who with unsparing hand uplifts the veil which covers the hidden canker of all human corruption, or shrouds the feebler frailties of all human self-illusion. The Artist, by nature callous, and by suffering rendered strong, held little sympathy with that Humanity into whose life his genius gave him an insight clear and unerring, yet unmixed with any gleam of either tenderness or love.

His Art was even as the very life of his own life, and for the rest he cared—so little.

For twelve unbroken days he worked on at his picture. Never ceasing, nor pausing in his work whilst daylight lasted, save now and then to eat such few dry crusts of bread as his poor garret held, or to drink an occasional deep draught of water. The fever, the ecstasy of the creative genius was upon him, and as he worked he knew those hours, so brief and yet so beautiful, when all the man dies in the Artist, and all the mortal is absorbed in the infinity of the immortal.

From out of his crown of Thorns had grown his crown of Stars!

For verily it was a marvellous creation this picture which had been conceived amidst the agony and desolation of its creator, and painted even as it were with his heart's blood. A work grand in its conception; perfect in its pure harmony of form and outline, its dreamy idealism and unutterable sadness—and when on the last day the artist stood before his finished toil, he knew, through the unerring instinct of the genius within him, that it was the highest and the best work he had ever wrought.

For a while he stood quite motionless before it, with a look of coldness yet of sadness in his eyes, which deepened as he watched the pale rays of the chill winter's light cast its cold beams above the impassioned, upturned faces of the crowd, and over the mocking crimson radiance of the blood-red Flowers.

For a while he stood thus—then suddenly his eyes grew sightless with a great dark mist. Cold, famine, want, and the long hours of fevered toil at length had told upon him, and with one weary shuddering sigh, he sank down slowly to the ground—just at the foot of his great picture of the Flowers of Dreams!

\* \* \* \* \*

A few hours later there came a Stranger to the lonely garret—a mighty art-patron, rich and generous, one whose praise meant fame through all the world of Art. He had chanced one day to be entering a great art-dealer's just as the artist was leaving it with one of his rejected pictures, and in that passing glimpse he had been deeply struck with the singular strength and masterly colouring of the work. A man of little leisure, he had had no time that day to arrest the artist's hurrying footsteps, but had resolved upon his first free day himself to seek him out.

Gently he now unclosed the garret door and entered. Then seeing the Artist lying as one who sleeps after long toil, he moved noiselessly across the room to where, upon a rough wood easel, hung the great picture of the Flowers of Dreams!

Long and intently did he gaze upon it. For well-accustomed as his eyes were to all forms of Art, yet nevertheless there lay some chill yet virile force within this work, which moved him strangely.

There—written for all time in that great colour-tongue he understood the best—there hung the mute, incarnate shape of that bitter, sad allegory of Life and Death, which had seemed to the Artist's soul to be the final end and goal of all humanity.

Musingly the stranger stood and scanned each bold, clear line, each calm fair curve of this strange work. Watched how the same hot flush of the broad noontide sun which fell on the murderer's bloated face, fell also on the bowed, sad head of the pale monk, illumining the brilliant, burning beauty of the dark-tressed eastern wanton, casting its pitiless, unshadowed



lustre 'above the wistful, azure eyes of the young maiden, and piercing deep down into the blood-red hearts of the tall, crimson Poppy flowers—those Flowers of Dreams and of Desires, whose blossoms glittered scarlet right up to the steep banks of the chill stream of Death, then at its water's brink grew dim and colourless, like the pale spectres of some phantom flowers lost in the shadows of a starless night.

There was but little tenderness amidst the burning colour, and merciless, chill ironies of this strange work ; yet as he looked on it, a deep and almost passionate pity for its creator rose in the stranger's heart.

"He could paint that," he exclaimed at length, "and he starves here in a garret !"

Then gently he stooped down, and touched the Artist's shoulder.

"Wake up, my friend," he said kindly. "This is no time for dreams, when all Paris is only waiting to see your canvasses to give you gold and fame."

But the Artist neither spoke nor stirred. The stranger bent over him.

He was dead !

Silent and still he lay—just at the foot of his great picture of the Flowers of Dreams !

\* \* \* \* \*

At the stranger's desire they buried him far away from all the riot and corruption of the great city ; far away, where the green, tranquil woodlands and shadowy purple plains stretch their calm width beneath the wide, pure skies.

And the seasons came and went. And when the early autumn days shone down upon the earth, it chanced that all the open wind-swept plains outside this tranquil, fair Garden of Sleep, grew crimson with the bright bloom of the tall, red Poppy flowers. And one chill, moonless night, a wild, tempestuous storm-wind blew in from over the sea, breaking the branches of the woodland trees, and scourging the proud, tall Poppy crests all level with the dank, dark earth !

And through the sullen, dreary darkness of the black, tempestuous night, the Stormwind cried to the Poppies, saying :

"O, Poppies, flowers of sleep and passions ! tell me, I pray, what is the unknown meaning of all mortal life ?"

And the dying poppies drooped their scourged heads, and answered, sighing :

“Brief Days of Dreams and of Desires—then the chill shadows of the Night of Death !”

But through the dreary, moonless darkness, the Stormwind moaned once more, and said :

“Desires, Dreams—Death ! Thus much, indeed, we understand of Life ! Yet what is the true answer to the world’s long pain, and to the weary cry of all the ages ?”

Then high above the stricken Poppies, cleaving the darkness with her outstretched wings, there rose a snow-white dove. And as she upwards soared through the black shadows of the starless night was echoed this one answer :

“Immortality !”

Upwards, and ever upwards, flew the snow-white dove. And as she higher rose, from out the darkened storm-swept heavens upon her soft, white wings there fell one beam of golden light.

Then slowly in the East the red dawn broke.

CLARE VYVIAN.

## Haunted.

“ King’s House, Brayfield,

“ November 20th.

“ DEAR GEOFF,

“ Can you come down here for two or three days, now, *at once* ? I know how pressed you are, and would not ask but am in need of advice, and would be inexpressibly relieved if you could come ; I can’t explain why in this, but have a good reason. I’ll meet every train from the time this reaches you—*don’t* fail me, dear fellow.

“ Yours,

“ JOHN ARMYTAGE.

“ I have opened this again to urge you to come. I shall go mad if this goes on much longer.”

“ What’s up ? ” soliloquised the Rev. Geoffery Curtis, returning this note to its envelope, and beginning breakfast with a disturbed air. “ John is not generally mysterious—‘pressed’ ? Yes, I am pressed, but not so much now that Archer has come back. Of course, I must go—I wonder what the Vicar will say ? ”

The Vicar, however, had no objection to make. Mr. Curtis had never before asked for an irregular holiday, and, knowing as he did all about John Armytage, the mystery suggested by the note excited his interest strongly. “ You have not heard from him since his arrival at his unknown heritage ? ” he interrogated, and Geoffery shook his head.

“ Not a line. It’s over a week now too, and he promised to write off at once and describe everything ; it’s so unlike John.”

“ Most unlike John,” assented Mr. Churton, smiling. “ Go, by all means—I hope you will find nothing very serious amiss. Archer says he feels up to undertaking treble the amount of work I have given him, so we can manage very well without you.”

Thus it came that Geoffery set forth from Brixton early that same afternoon and arrived at Brayfield before dark.

Geoffery Curtis and John Armytage were friends—the former a gentleman and curate, the latter a gentleman too, but struggling against heavy odds to gain a living as an artist. Some few months before the dark November day on which this history opens, John had become the possessor of a considerable property by the will of an old man, Anthony Gates by name, who lived opposite John's studio and occasionally came across to watch the young man at work. A strange affection sprang up between the two, though more often than not they would meet and part without interchanging half-a-dozen words. John had no idea that his visitor was well off; his rooms were dingy in the extreme; his habit of life simple, almost miserly. His astonishment was great when the news reached him, and Geoffery, to whom he rushed at once, was equally surprised. Both were eager to see the house—King's House, Brayfield—but to John's great disappointment his friend could not accompany him on his visit of inspection, and he departed alone, promising to write fully "all about everything." No news of him, however, reached his friend till the arrival of the disquieting note, the result of which we know.

Arrived at Brayfield, Geoffery had scarcely put his foot on the platform when he was seized upon delightedly by a lanky figure in a dripping mackintosh.

"My dear fellow! It's not really you!"

"It's my arm, at any rate," laughed the rather slightly-built curate, shaking hands warmly. "Well, my landed proprietor, how are you?"

The landed proprietor made a grimace.

"Oh, don't ask! Come along—this is just too good to be true. I drove over with a faint hope, and yet it wasn't like you to fail—there, that's not bad-looking, is it?"

"That" was a handsome new dog-cart and dapper little horse, and Curtis admired both heartily.

"Gates got it on purpose for me a month before he died," went on Armytage, springing up after his friend and taking the reins.

"You must have fascinated him entirely," answered Mr. Curtis, through the thick muffler he had drawn up over his face.

"You really are the *most* fortunate fellow I've ever had the unhappiness of knowing."

"Am I?" said John with a grim little smile. "It's all right now you've come; but this past week——"

He broke off, and there was silence for some minutes as they drove rapidly along the bleak high road, the rain beating down straight on their faces, and the dusk growing thicker.

"There it is," pointing through the trees to the left, and the next moment they were in full sight of the house.

It was a massive, handsome building, standing back some distance from the road, and approached by a broad drive, lined thickly by tall but now leafless trees. A fine stately mansion, Geoffery decided, but with an air of desertion and neglect which struck the most careless observer with strange force.

"It looks haunted," he said, and John turned and looked at him earnestly, his face paling visibly as he did so.

"*Then it looks what it is,*" he said in a strained low voice, and Geoffery started slightly.

"My dear fellow!" he exclaimed involuntarily, and then was silent till they drew up before the open door, from whence a warm welcoming glow of light poured out on the dreary avenue.

Flinging the reins to the groom, John led the way through a square formal hall into a small and thoroughly comfortable sitting room where, early though it was, dinner was laid.

"This is about the jolliest room in the house," said the host, throwing his gloves into one corner, and emptying a huge chair of its load of magazines and newspapers by simply tilting it backwards. "Truffle's a splendid hand at making a fire, ain't you, Truffle?" this to the elderly, respectable man-servant, who was gravely collecting the wraps thrown off by the visitor. "And Mrs. Truffle, where have you put her, Truffle?—she's just as good at making a dinner! No more tough steaks and mahogany potatoes, old chap! Do you remember the awful dishes that old woman of mine used to send up, Geoff? Just to think it's only a fortnight ago!"

The dinner proved indeed a success; no serious subject was touched upon by either. Mr. Curtis retailed London, or rather Brixton, news, and it was not till some time after the table had

been cleared—for they resolved to sit in the same room instead of migrating to the larger but less comfortable smoking-room—that Mr. Curtis, after a pause in the conversation, leant back and looked up at his friend expectantly.

“Well, John?”

“Well,” rather sheepishly.

Another pause.

“I know you’ll call me a fool.”

“Very probably.”

“Only all I can say is that I hope you’ll be able to prove I *am* one.”

“Your wishes will most likely be realised; fire away!”

“Look here, then,” springing up and taking up his position on the hearthrug in front of the fire. “You know how mystified we both were over that queer sentence in old Gates’ will?”

“Yes, the sentence saying——”

“Yes, saying that he left his property to me because he believed I would ‘on all occasions do my duty, however fearful it might be,’ those were the words—well, look here, read that; he wrote it some time before he died and told Allen, the local solicitor, to give it to me when I came down to take possession.”

Geoffery took the letter and read it with growing astonishment.

“King’s House.

“JOHN ARMYTAGE,

“When you read this I shall be in my grave, and you will have entered into possession of this house.

“As you know, my will imposes no condition whatever upon your ownership, nevertheless, I have a request to make to you, and trust that your generosity will grant it. It is this: the door leading into the west wing of this house is now locked and barred—let it remain so; I have never set foot within it. Why, you will learn before you have been here long; the story in its entirety is known to Truffle—a garbled version obtains in the village. John Armytage, I solemnly adjure you to regard this wish of mine: I am dying—you will soon forget me; but remember—remember—and obey.

“Pray for my soul.

“ANTHONY GATES.”

"Extraordinary!" ejaculated the curate—"was he sane?—are you sure this is not a trick got up?"

"Quite sure—he wrote it in Allen's presence, and told him to give it to me himself *when* I came down."

"Extraordinary!" repeated Geoffery, "but go on—what did you do?"

"Well, of course, I attacked Truffle promptly, and he told me the story, which is pretty well known for miles round. This is called the 'Haunted House,' if you please, and tourists come to look at it—pleasant, isn't it? Truffle and his wife are tough, and stay on, but not another indoor-servant would stay for love or money. Truffle's father was here before him so he knows all."

"But my dear boy——"

"Yes, I know what you're going to say, but it's not only what *they* say that I'm going upon, but I feel myself——"

"Never mind what you feel—have you *seen* anything?"

"No—o—but yet—Good God, Geoffery!" turning suddenly, and putting his hand on his friend's shoulder, his voice shaken with agitation, "it's the most awful experience to sit here alone night after night, and yet feel *that you're not alone!*"

The curate's pale face had turned a little paler; then, with an effort:

"We are never alone, thank God," he said quietly.

"The story Truffle tells is this," went on John, in a quick, low voice, "one of the bygone Gates—not so long ago either—was a clergyman, and a queer fellow, self-contained, you know, and all that, and he was in love with a girl, awfully handsome, Truffle says, who didn't care a farthing for him, but liked his brother instead. Well, she was staying here once and I suppose he found out she didn't want him or something, but any way, she was found one morning in the west wing passage with her throat cut. Nobody was suspected *then*, but a year afterwards—a year to the very day, mind you—the brother, not the clergyman, was found in the same way, in his bed—*his* room was in the west wing too. Then suspicion fell on the priest, for he wasn't a favourite with anybody, and there was known to be ill-blood between them; but before anything was done he hanged himself from a hook in the ceiling of the west wing passage, *just over the place where the girl's body was found!* Of course the story goes that they haunt the house—small wonder!—and the west



wing in particular, so Gates' father had it shut up. Now what do you say?"

"That the story is most ghastly, and that your liver is out of order. How do you sleep?"

John laughed shortly.

"Liver, is it? May be you'll find *your* liver out of order too, to-morrow morning! Well, as I said, if you can prove me a fool do so, nevertheless I am determined not to remain in this house alone on the 30th. The 30th of this month, you know, is *the* day—or rather the night of the year—and Truffle says that what goes on then is beyond description—throws the little everyday incidents which I am foolish enough to object to completely in the shade. Do you know that, as a fact, he and his wife make a point of leaving the house that night and sleeping in the village?"

"Incredible," murmured the curate; "yet why should I say so? are not all things possible? Why should not the spirits of the departed re-visit this world and make themselves both seen and heard? Such things have been known, but so rarely that one can not be too careful; but still John, don't think I scoff at what you say, I only think and hope that a practical solution will present itself, and I'll help you to look for it."

"Thanks, you can stay longer than the week, can't you, now that Archer has come back?"

"Oh, yes, that is unless some unforeseen emergency should——who was that?" for he had heard the door behind him softly open and shut.

John smiled quietly.

"What?"

"Someone opened the door just now?"

"Oh, no, you only fancied that!" with grim sarcasm. "That's the sort of thing that goes on here of an evening." Geoffery stared at him for a moment, rose, opened the door, and looked out. The hall was empty and silent, the several doors opening off it shut. He tried the handles, all were locked except one, that of the large dining-room, dimly lighted. He turned back into the sitting-room.

"*Did* the door open?"

"No, it only sounded like that. I've heard it lots of times. Coming downstairs you could take your oath somebody's keeping

step with you—out in the garden, by Jove! You can't escape it—somebody's dogging your steps, stopping when you stop, turning when you turn, only you can't see them!"

\* \* \* \* \*

It was past eleven when the friends went to bed. Geoffery's room was on the first broad landing, John's was opposite, and on the other side a heavily-barred oaken door, which the curate saw with a slight half-unconscious shudder. A heavy velvet curtain usually hung over it, but for some reason this had been drawn on one side. It was the door leading to the west wing. John's explanatory "that's it" was unnecessary. Nothing further was said. After a moment's close inspection both young men went into the guests' room, which was large, heavily but comfortably furnished, and lighted by a huge fire and handsome lamp which shed a soft and brilliant light from its pedestal. The bed stood in a recess, into which, however, it did not fit well, a space of about two feet being left between it and the wall. A long tasselled bell-rope hung down by the side.

"If you tug it," laughed the host, "I'll come to your assistance. I'm more at home with ghosts than you."

Left alone Geoffery, as he prepared for bed, naturally turned over in his mind the great subject of the evening's conversation. Rather, he tried to do so, for before long he became conscious of a strange feeling of exhaustion and depression which was creeping over him—a strange feeling which he weakly and vainly tried to shake off.

Once in bed he would be all right, he reflected, and at last he was ready. Lowering the lamp, piling up the fire, locking the door—all was done, and he sank wearily down with a heavy sigh.

But he did not sleep at once. His mind was still full of that subject, and his thoughts were clearer than they had been a few minutes ago. John was in a bad state of mind, that was plain; he was a sociable fellow and needed company, and here he had been alone in this big gloomy house with nobody to talk to but Truffle, who told blood-curdling stories like others of his class, which naturally set his imagination on fire, and——

What was that?

Only a cinder falling out of the fire, but what a noise it made. How foolish of him to start!

Yes, John being so nervous, so fanciful, he himself would have to be careful—not to—not to——

How hot it was! The room had suddenly become stifling. He turned over impatiently and flung the counterpane back half angrily. It was the heat made him so restless—he would not have a fire again; besides, the flickering lights it cast were disagreeable; they annoyed him—just now when one glanced upon the curtains at the foot of the bed—it almost seemed for the moment—as if—a hand—had moved them stealthily—absurd! He had actually started up with a tight throat and clenched hands; just because he had listened to a horrible story was he to fancy impossibilities like any superstitious nursemaid?

He *would* sleep.

Lying in one attitude and resolutely keeping the eyes shut may sometimes be effectual, but not so to-night. He presently became aware that his muscles were rigid—his nerves tingling—that his senses were at their keenest.

His watch was under the pillow—how loud its tick sounded! never so loud before, surely; or was it that he was listening intently—with wildly-throbbing pulses and convulsively-beating heart—to a strange sound—a rustle—a footstep—coming softly across the room from the door—so softly—nearer—till it stopped *behind the bed!*

Utterly powerless to move or speak or open his eyes—bound and silenced by an awful horror pressing down upon him from That which bent over him, closing out air and light and life—oh God, for strength to turn and *look!*—how long—how long—and then, when life itself seemed ebbing from him, one word was whispered in his ear—whispered so softly, yet so clearly, that it passed through his brain like a shriek and left him senseless in a swoon:

*“Murdered! Not by me!”*

Some hours later John Armytage was welcoming Mr. Churton, Geoffery’s vicar, to Brayfield, and giving him a full account of all that you already know; while Geoffery himself, white and aged, but resolute in a great purpose, leant back and listened, and when his time came, told his part.

“When I recovered,” he went on, “all that senseless fear had

gone from me, and I slept quietly, and in that sleep Richard Gates, the priest who was accused of Adeline Holt's murder—of his own brother's murder—appeared to me and told me that he was innocent, and that the proofs were secreted in the west wing, and I promised him—the room was still ringing with my voice when I awoke—I promised him to do what I could to give him rest. That was his room I slept in," he added, turning to John; "I felt sure of it myself, but Truffle confirms me."

"But the will," said the vicar; "I don't see how you can set that aside without——"

"The will imposed no condition whatever upon me," interrupted John. "It was the letter."

"Ah, yes—and that is even more binding—a dying man's wish——"

"But he wishes differently now," Geoffery said; "how I know I cannot tell you, but I feel convinced that it is so."

The vicar ruffled his hair distractedly.

"I know you are anxious to do right," Mr. Curtis went on, speaking rapidly. "Listen. Let us watch to-night and look for a sign."

So it was settled.

The dreary day sank at length into the dreary night, and the two men at last began that watch.

Downstairs John Armytage waited with Truffle—listening for every sound and cursing his own folly, which kept him from joining them above.

The wind howled round the house with a despairing sadness no words can describe; the atmosphere to Mr. Churton was thick with a horror which stirred his hair and almost stopped his breath.

Quite silent.

Listening.

Then——It came!

The vicar's first intimation of Its presence was Geoffery's face, which, deadly white, turned from the fire and looked across the room. The strong man felt the blood run cold within him as that footstep sounded upon the floor.

Then Geoffery rose, and, with a convulsive effort, Herbert Churton rose too and faced It—that invisible—that most Awful presence!

Then came the clear voice of the younger man, sounding to the other strangely pure and sweet.

"Richard Gates—if it is your spirit—which haunts this room," a pause to gain strength, "I promise—to do what I can to give you rest—if you will make your mission known."

No answer, though both men heard It breathe.

"I will make your innocence known—rest in peace."

Again no answer, but the horror-stricken watcher knew that the room was clear again—that It had gone—and that it was the cold hand of his friend which pressed him back into a seat.

"It is right now—if only Anthony Gates would remove——"

A deafening crash silenced him. A gust of wind had seized the house and shook it with the fury of an angry devil.

The west wing had fallen !

Wildly improbable as this sounds, it is true ; and the stout oak door, with its bolts and bars, hung creaking from its mighty hinges.

The rest of the house was almost uninjured, but the unquiet spirit which restlessly had haunted it troubled it no more, for in the ruins was found, locked and sealed up in a casket, the full confession of Henry Gates—the favoured lover of Adeline Holt—that he, and not his brother, had murdered her on the eve of her flight from King's House with a more wealthy suitor. His own death was self-inflicted, but contrived with devilish intent that his brother, whom he hated as only a bad man can hate a good one, should bear the blame.

And it was so ; for the family, anxious only to hush the terrible story up, did not investigate the matter properly ; and the poor priest—shunned by all, guilty in his own mind of anger to the dead man, distrustful of himself, sick at heart and utterly forlorn—at last gave way and hanged himself, thereby fixing the guilt most surely upon his own head.

Now, he rests in peace.

E. W.

## **A Dream of a Wild White Doe.**

### **THE STORY OF A SOUL.**

“ Pilgrim of Earth, who art journeying to Heaven !  
Heir of eternal life ! child of the day !  
Cared for, watched over, beloved and forgiven,  
Art thou discouraged because of the way ? ”

—From “ The Changed Cross.”

ONCE in a certain far-off land there dwelt a little woodland Doe.  
And this Doe was snow-white.

Now every Doe which is born in Fawn-land has a long journey before it, at the end of which there stands a Great High Hill. And from the summit of this Hill alone, may be beheld the distant glories of those worlds which lie beyond the boundaries of Fawn-land. Now it is amongst the inviolable laws of Fawn-land that none may remain motionless. All, all must journey onwards. Yet some instead of journeying forwards towards the Great High Hill are tempted into other paths and wander away into the lower valleys, where grow the deadly poison berries, and soon become so feeble from the poisoned fruits, that they lose all power to seek again the higher paths, and so perish miserably, or are devoured by the wild beasts of the woods.

Now this little woodland Doe, had been born in one of the fairest, sunniest parts of Fawn-land. Tall forest-glades, all lovely with the snowy grace of white star-lilies, and gladsome with the tender chants of silver-throated nightingales, stretched all around her. And through these radiant, sunlit forest-aisles, she wandered light of heart with all the little Fawns, her brethren, round about her. Each day they went a little further on their road. But the upward path was unto them so easy, and the way so flower-grown and sun-kissed, that they scarce dreamed that life could ever hold aught save one golden summer-world, all fragrant with the milk-white bloom of lilies, and with the dewy fairness of soft wood-grown asphodels.

And so this little Doe grew up strong and gladsome, rejoicing in the sunlight and the flowers, “ thinking no evil because she knew of none.” And able to look up fearlessly into the sunlight,



for the strength of truth was in her eyes, and the sheen of innocence was all about her.

Thus, in a shadowless and sunny calm, passed many years, until at length one day there came a Messenger from the great King of Fawn-land, who said it was decreed that this little Doe must be severed from amidst all her brethren, and must henceforward journey towards the Great High Hill through the far-distant paths of a vast city. And as she listened to these words the little Doe wept bitterly. But yet she durst not disobey the will of the great King. So with a breaking heart, she bade farewell to all her brethren; and as they clustered sorrowing about her, one amongst them, the little sister she had loved the best amongst them all, clung to her to the last, saying:

"O, little sister! My heart is heavy for this parting, since all our lives we have been undivided! But yet, forget not, we are journeying both towards the same High Hill—and it may be that some day, not now perhaps, but in some far-away Hereafter, our now sundered paths may once again be brought together."

Then slowly and sadly the little woodland Doe followed the Royal Messenger.

At the city gates he left her.

"Further," he said, "I cannot be thy guide, for it is so decreed that every Doe which enters here, must of her own free will, choose her own path. Only one counsel I would give to thee. Remember always, that the Great High Hill, which thou must seek, lies in a clear, straight line from here. And now, farewell, may peace go with thee."

Then when the King's Messenger had left her, the little Doe began to look tremblingly and anxiously about her. The streets were long and dark and gloomy, and filled with a great vast multitude of deer. Some of these but for their form she would scarcely have known to be Deer at all, so different were they from her little, gentle, soft-eyed, woodland brethren. Hardly any of them were pure white. A greyish tint was upon most of them. Some had large dark stains all over them. Many were limping and deformed; whilst some were so mis-shapen and diseased, that only to look upon them made her shudder!

And nearly all amongst them seemed to be going different ways. Some backwards, some sideways. Some hastening, some crawling; some moving with slow, halting footsteps, some hurry-



ing with wild, feverish unrest, and only a few—a very few—going steadily forwards, and even these could make scarce any way against the hurrying, jostling multitudes. Yet seeing that these were striving, even as she herself was striving, to reach the Great High Hill, the little Doe, being very lonely and desolate in this strange city, went unto them and would fain have walked beside them. But they, seeing her not to be one of their own kindred, repulsed her harshly.

“It is true,” they answered coldly, “that we all are journeying unto the same end. Yet thine eyes see not the distant Hill, as our eyes see it. Thy footsteps move not at the same pace as do our own, and therefore we can hold no fellowship with thee.”

Then, passing onwards with averted looks, they left the little woodland Doe to pursue her path unaided and alone!

As to the rest they did but impede her progress, sometimes maliciously endeavouring to trip her up upon the rough, hard paving-stones, and sometimes almost trampling her to death in the blind frenzy of their angry quarrels. Yet though very weary and sad at heart, the little woodland Doe strove bravely onwards, even though she oft-times yearned with a deep and almost passionate despair for the old lost sweetness of her forest-home! And all the gladness seemed to have died out of her youth, pent in amidst the joyless, loveless darkness of this sad, gloomy city!

“Alas!” she murmured one day, as she looked up through the chill, raw, mist-hung air to where the black and lowering clouds hid all the sky from view. “Alas! for the golden days that are dead! Alas! for the green forest glades so flower-grown and fragrant! Alas! for the laughing sunlight, and tenderly-gleaming starlight! Alas! for the love of my brethren, whose life-paths are severed from mine!”

Then, as she thought of her brethren now far, far away from her path, the pain of her great desolation seemed harder, more cruel, than she could endure—and she bowed her head to the ground and wept with the passionate anguish of one who is friendless, forlorn, and an exile.

Now, whilst she was yet weeping, there chanced to pass that way, another Fawn, who paused, and looked with curious wonder on her. And this Fawn, unlike many of the others, had scarcely

any black spot upon it. And it was only, if you looked very long, and very closely, that you could behold one small black stain just above the heart. But this the little woodland Doe did not perceive, for her eyes were too blinded with tears, and all that she noticed was that this little Fawn was the only living thing which had looked on her with gentleness since first she had entered the city.

"Poor little Doe," the other Fawn said gently, "what evil thing hath chanced to thee, that thou dost weep so wearily alone?"

And the little woodland Doe, still weeping, answered :

"Alas! I am so weary of my life within this city! For the road is hard and steep, and my feet are bruised and weary. And I long for the sweet lost sunlight of my youth, and for the music of my brethren's voices. And I am all alone, and desolate—and none is there to care!"

"Nay, say not so," the other Fawn made answer, "for I am come to aid and comfort thee. I know where shines a light far fairer than thy vanished sunlight. A valley wherein thou mayest find friends far tenderer than the lost friends of thy youth. Waters far sweeter than thy forest-streams. And flowers whose radiant colouring would put all thy paler woodland-flowers to shame. Come, let me lead thee to this land of pleasantness and light?"

But the little woodland Doe paused, doubting.

"Some say," she murmured, "that one should keep ever to this path, however rough or steep it may appear, for that they who go down into the valleys lose their way and oftentimes perish."

"O foolish little Doe," the other Fawn made answer. "They did but tell thee such legends to terrify thee. Perchance afar off there may lie some perilous ravines. But the valley to which I would lead thee, is quite close at hand, and filled with sweet and harmless fruits and flowers."

Yet the little woodland Doe followed with steps half doubting. Her soul was as yet stainless of desire for evil, she was only weak and very weary, and the High Hill seemed so far away, and those who were seeking it would hold no kinship with her, and her heart was aching to be loved as in the old days, and to be no longer friendless and alone.

Marking her doubt, the other Fawn continued speaking in

soft, flute-like tones, fraught with the subtle eloquence of one who, with the knowledge born of many years knows how to turn the wistful pathos of a childlike weariness of pain into the restless anger of a rebellious bitterness of fate.

"See here," her tempter said, "the upward path is dark and dreary! Its sharp stones wound and cut thy feet—not one amidst its hurrying crowds cares aught if thou shouldst live or die! Yet thou art young and fair to see!—and wilt thou choose to spend the fairest of thy days in an existence loveless, joyless, barren of all things, saving one weary and unending struggle? The Hill thou seekest is, all wise deer say, naught but a mirage—the phantom-creation of some dreamer's brain. The actual joys of life lie in these beauteous valleys, where are the lovely palaces of delight. Look now behind thee—and before—then make thy choice?"

Then the little Doe looked back. And behind her she beheld the chill, dark city, with its gloomy, sunless streets, and weary, restless multitudes, half lost in fog and darkness—and before her she beheld a lovely Palace, glittering and glorious, whose stately crystal columns were all wreathed with crimson Roses, and with pale, star-eyed Passion-flowers. The silver-woven draperies which concealed the Palace doors had been flung widely backwards and from within the marble courtyards fell the rhythmic music of a thousand fountains whose diamond sprays flashed golden beneath the bright flames of the rose-scented, amber-coloured light.

Yet, though half blinded with the brilliance of this sudden glow of colour, and though half dazed with the sweet, heavy perfumes of the exotic flowers—yet still the little woodland Doe lingered, half-doubting, on the Palace threshold.

She paused!—a pause such as those shining angels, whose soft eyes keep watch above the faltering steps of little pilgrims, may have noted with tenderest wistfulness!

And then, half in a dream, she entered, and immediately around her clustered a great throng of Does and Deer, who, with their gladsome, mingled voices, bade her joyous welcome.

"O, wise little Doe!" they cried, "to come and join the revels of our Palace of Delight! Come, eat of our crimson roses, and drink of our golden fountains—and rejoice, and be glad! For the Great High Hill is not, and the Path of Truth is not! And

only what we see and feel exists ; therefore let us be glad with all the gladness of our care-forgetting lives ! ”

Then they gave the little Doe to drink of their golden fountains, and to eat of their red-leaved roses, and spoke to her with so much tenderness, that at last she could have wept for very gladness, to know that she was no longer desolate and loveless.

And so she dwelt amongst them many days ; until at length, all desire to seek the Great High Hill passed from out her mind, for all her days were filled with gladness and with melody. And at night her couch was strewn with crimson Rose-leaves, whose fragrance stole through all her dreams, and made them subtly sweet and fair.

But it so chanced, that one night whilst she slept, a sharp thorn, which had lain concealed amidst the rose-leaves, pierced her soft flesh, and she awoke with a sudden, sharp pain at her heart, and throwing aside all the rose-leaves of her couch she—for the first time—slept without them.

Then, after a while, she had a wondrous dream !

She dreamt that she was walking with all her companions through the palace halls, rejoicing 'midst the bright flowers of the crimson roses—when suddenly there came a crash ! A crash as of a thousand peals of thunder rolled in one, and a great tongue of fire leapt up from underneath the earth. And all the crimson rose-leaves fell scorched and shrivelled from their stems—then, wild and terrified, all the little Fawns fled to the doors—but when they reached them a great black river enclosed the palace walls on every side ! And in the wild confusion the foremost of the Fawns was pushed into the waters and sank down, down into the bottomless depths !—and all the rest rushed backwards, and were swiftly devoured by the fierce tongues of fire.

And whilst she seemed to be still struggling 'midst the flames, the little Doe awoke from her dream. And a great fear filled her heart !

Then, trembling and terror-stricken, she arose and went to seek the others. But they would not heed her. And for the first time they spoke harshly and roughly to her. So she crept away again by herself, and would join no more in the Red-Rose feast, for the horror of her dream was still upon her, and through

the crimson fairness of the bright Rose-petals she seemed to see naught saving a mass of withered leaves, all blackened and decayed !

Then when they saw that she shrank from their revels, all her companions grew very bitter against her. And several of them, joining together, fell upon her and trampled fiercely on her with their feet, until she was so bruised that she could scarcely draw her breath, but lay prostrate and stupefied with pain and with exhaustion.

Then, thinking she was dead, they went out one by one and left her.

And after a while, when she awoke again to consciousness and gazed bewildered about her, she perceived that she was all alone in one of the great marble, Rose-grown palace halls. Then, giddy and afraid, she staggered feebly to her feet and crept towards the doorway.

The one instinct in her mind, still all confused with pain and terror, was a great, great longing to escape—to escape from her dream-haunted palace, to escape from her false-hearted friends !

And hastening to the doorway with a panting heart and quivering limbs, she stole out of the palace and fled blindly onwards—onwards, she knew not, cared not, where—so only she might leave that fair, yet thrice accursèd, valley far behind her !

The outer air struck coldly on her frame, long enervated by the exotic, hot-house fragrance of the palace halls. But she would give herself no pause, till far away from reach of all pursuit, she stood amidst the silence and the solitude of a wild and deserted moorland.

Then timidly she looked about her. Between her and the sky there lay no intervening shadows. And widely different from the laughing lustre of that golden yet artificial light which had filled the palace halls, the grey, unshadowed daylight now cast its cold, unsparing beams on all around her. Then, as she looked, of a sudden the horror of a great amazement filled her, for in the cold, clear, white light of the day, she beheld for the first time that all the fairness of her snow-white skin had been darkened and sullied with innumerable stains blacker than night, and widespread as some loathsome plague-marks !

Then an anguish more cruel than aught of the physical pains she had endured, rent her soul—the anguish for an innocence



which has for ever fled, and for a youth whose stainless purity lies dead !

And she drooped her head to the ground, and bent her eyes to the earth, since through the passionate self-reproach which stung her, each ray of the clear daylight seemed to condemn the foulness of her dark-stained soul !

A great horror had fallen upon her !

She had a horror of all life !

She had a horror of herself !—since she seemed in her own sight to be a thing leprous and loathsome, unclean and defiled !

And then, deep-mingled with the agony of her remorse, a great weariness of life stole over her. What use to strive for the Great High Hill ? It was so far—ah ! Heaven—how far away ! She felt no force to seek again the upward path. And of life, material, and full of weariness, her soul was sick ! The good seemed all too hard ! the evil all too vile ! and what she most desired was rest—rest, in the passionless repose of some oblivion which should hold neither desire, nor yet reproach !

She knew the plants on which there grew the purple-shadowed Berries that were called the Berries of Eternal Sleep, and which were said to hold the power to lull remorse into forgetfulness. She would seek some of them. She cared not if some poison lurked within them, so only they might hold some spell potent enough to drug her weary soul into forgetfulness ; so that, no longer haunted with reproachful memories of the distant hill, she might yield up her will for ever to the magnetic influence of their sleep-giving spell !

She looked around her, and amidst the stunted herbage of the plain, she beheld a clump of tangled briers, thick-laden with the purple Berries. Eagerly she stretched her fevered lips towards them, but ere the dark, poisoned fruits had touched her mouth, she heard the flutter as of a soft rush of wings upon the wind, and low above her down-bent head was breathed these words :

“ Pilgrim of Earth, who art journeying to Heaven !  
Heir of eternal life ! child of the day !  
Cared for, watched over, beloved and forgiven,  
Art thou discouraged because of the way ? ”

Back from the contact of the poisonous Berries swiftly she sprang. A clearer light seemed all at once to have rushed in

upon her life-tossed soul, and dimly now within her mind, still half-confused with pain and weariness, wakened some sense of that great truth that, whatever Life or Fate may hold, it is more brave to walk on fearlessly to meet it than to slink down shamefully away into the unhallowed darkness of some unknown night !

She raised her head, and strained her eyes to find the upward path so long forsaken. And to her joy she found that it lay nearer far than she could e'er have dared to hope !

Half in terror, half in hope, she moved towards it, and soon she found herself no longer on the lower road, but mounting slowly, slowly, and gaining a little with each step, even as in the old past days.

But, weary and life-worn now, the path seemed unto her much stiffer and much harder than before. The tirelessness of youth had left her feet. No flowers grew by this path. Her aching limbs could drag themselves but feebly over the rugged flint stones of the way. At times her panting breath almost failed her with the sharpness of the strain upon her weary frame. And now, as she climbed, the daylight began to fade into a dusk, mist-hung and mournful, which in its turn waned drearily into the darkness of a wild, tempestuous night.

Weary with pain, and with long journeying, the little Doe found that she could make scarce any way against the turbulence of the fierce hurricanes. Yet, nevertheless, her mind was set quite fast. Come pain, come storm, come cold, come tempest—yea, till death itself should come, she would still struggle onwards, upwards, to where she knew there lay the summits of the Great High Hill.

Now she had passed the first and second ridges of the Hill, and the King's Messenger had said that she must pass but three before she should behold the summit. Already she had just begun to traverse the first steps of this steep last ridge, when suddenly—loosened perchance by the fierce storm-winds—a huge sharp-cornered mass of rock came rolling swiftly downwards.

Full on the face it struck her—right across the eyes !

Swept backwards by the violence of the shock, she was hurled right down to the bottom of the Hill. Yet though half-dazed with pain and agony, she staggered bravely to her feet and strove



to look upwards. But a great impenetrable mist swam before her eyes, and a black unbroken darkness closed her in on every side.

Then suddenly across the chill night air there broke the passionate pain-cry of a soul in its great anguish.

"Blind!" she cried "blind! Ah! Never more shall I look on the fairness of the earth or sky! Never more gaze upon the laughing lustre of the golden sun, nor watch the pale pure stars shine through the violet shadows of the evening skies! Ah! never, never more! And yet doomed evermore to grope my sad way through the black darkness of an unbroken night—still I may strive to journey upwards! and though my darkened eyes may never gaze upon the glories of that wondrous land which lies beyond the summits of the hill, still it may be that I may catch some echo from the glad songs of those happier ones to whom it has been given to gaze upon the fairness of the Land of the Immortals!"

Then, gathering all her strength together for one last great effort, the little Doe began slowly and painfully to remount the steep ascent. Yet this time she was forced to go even more slowly than before, since from her sightlessness she had to slowly grope her way, taking each upward step in faith.

Slowly and falteringly she now climbed up the first ridge, then the second, and then began to grope her feeble way up the third. But by this time she had grown very weary. A large thorn which had pierced her foot made it bleed cruelly. And the loss of blood made her grow faint and giddy. Her quivering limbs faltered beneath her. And the sickly chills of a deadly faintness began to overpower her, when through the deathly lethargy which already began to overpower her she heard a low, soft voice, which whispered:

"Faint not, fail not, little Doe, for though life be long and weary yet rest comes at last and thou hast nearly reached thy journey's end!"

Then, slowly gathering all her strength together, the little Doe strove bravely to throw off the deadly faintness which began to numb and paralyse her limbs.

But it had grown too strong for her! And the true spirit which would have toiled so bravely on unto the end, lay vanquished now beneath the resistless force of an unconquerable physical

weakness, as with one weary and despairing cry she felt her faltering limbs give one last quiver, and then sink slowly to the ground.

Prostrate she lay and motionless, whilst the deadly numbness of an icy coldness began slowly to creep about her heart. She knew that this meant death. And it was no doubt only just that to her whose garments had been so sore steeped in sin, it should not be given to gaze upon the fairness of the Land of the Immortals, or even to catch the echo of the glad songs of those happier Does, more sinless and more blest!

Yes, it was just no doubt. And though it did seem hard—Ah! Heaven—how hard! to die now, only so few steps from the summit, still since the Great King had thus decreed her fate she knew that it was well.

So she folded her weary limbs together, and bowed her sad head in meekness to her doom.

But at that moment, just as all hope of reaching the summit had died out within her heart, suddenly upon her brow, already chilly with the dews of death, was laid a Hand. Its touch was as a flame of fire. Her feeble pulses throbbed and quickened. The blood rushed leaping through her veins, and with a sudden, wondrous, new-found strength she leapt on to her feet!

Then through the deep gloom of the night she felt that same strong Hand which drew her gently, slowly, onwards up the steep ascent. Till after a while it loosened its hold and as it did so, she found for the first time that she stood upon quite level ground!

Then whilst she stood still, all half-dazed with wonderment and awe, upon her listening ears fell the familiar sweetness of a voice, long-lost, yet unforgotten.

“O little sister,” said that gentle voice, “hast thou forgotten all the woodland days when we two wandered side by side towards the Better Land? And how when parting I bade thee remember that some day our sundered paths might once more meet again?”

Then a great cry, half-gladness and half-pain, broke from the little Doe, as with slow groping steps she moved towards the other, saying:

“Dear, long-lost sister, only to hear the music of thy voice makes all my heart rejoice—yet on the sweetness of thy face

alas ! I may not look, since my sad eyes are closed for ever unto all things glad and fair ! ”

Then, whilst she was still speaking, suddenly—unseen even by the little sister who stood by her side—across her eyes there fell a Hand ! One instant it lay on her darkened lids, then all at once a great light rushed in upon her, and she beheld her little sister standing beside her on the mountain’s crown !

Then, as she sprang towards her, she saw that o’er the brightness of the other’s face shone the great wonder as of one who for the first time looks upon some far-off glory, long dreamt of, but only now beheld !

“ O, turn thy gaze swiftly towards the East,” her little sister cried, “ for lo ! the long dark night has passed away, and yonder the sunshine breaks above the long lines of the Everlasting Hills and over the cloudless fairness of the Land of the Immortals ! ”

Then the little woodland Doe turned her glance towards the East. And as she gazed a great and mighty flood of gladness rushed in upon her heart, and she sank down on the grass and wept for very gladness, saying :

“ I have lived long enough—I am ready now to die ! ”

But the other Doe made answer, saying softly :

“ Belovèd—this is Death ! ”

CORALIE GLYN.